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Mechanical weirdness inside BMW's funky F450GS

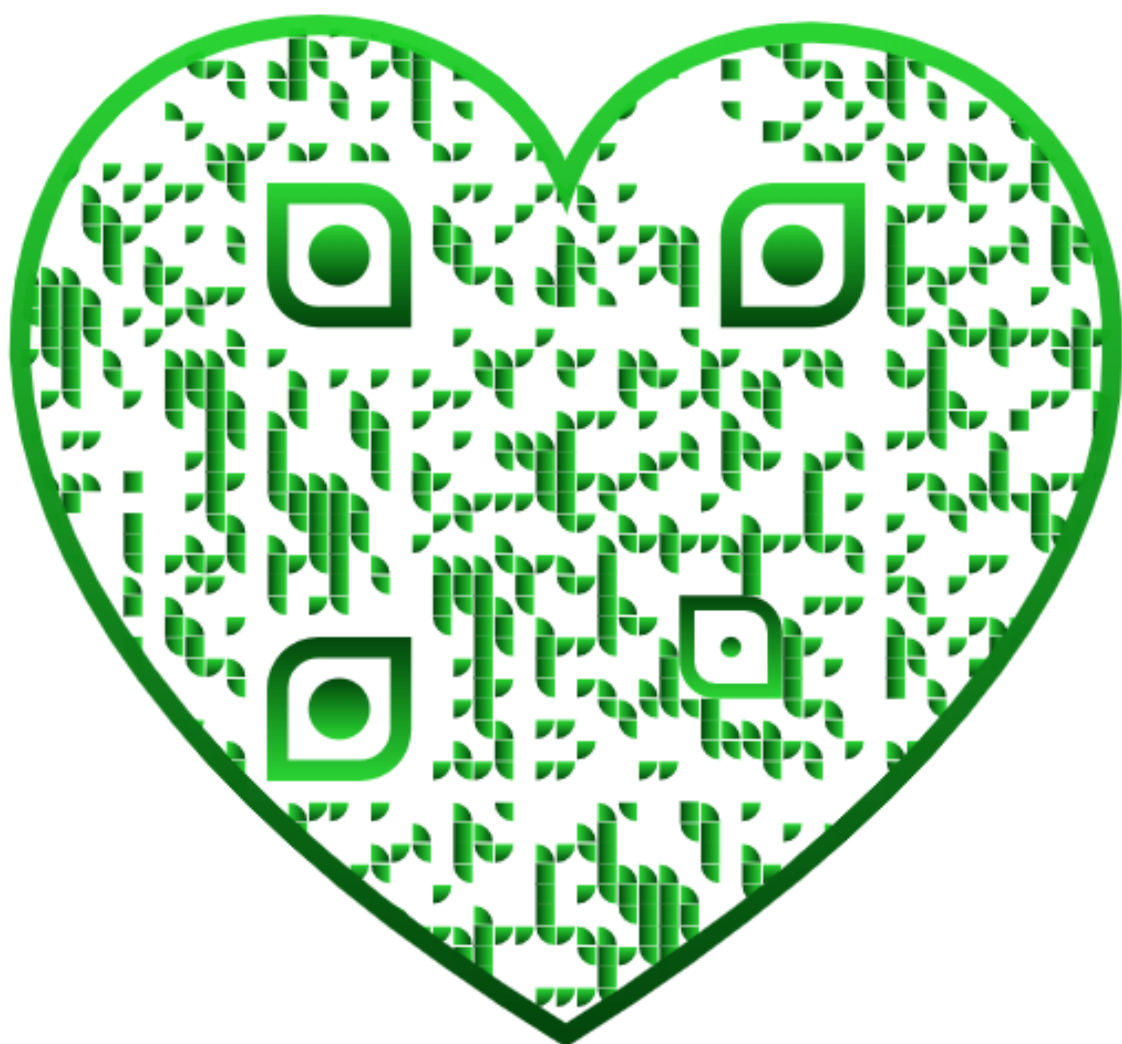
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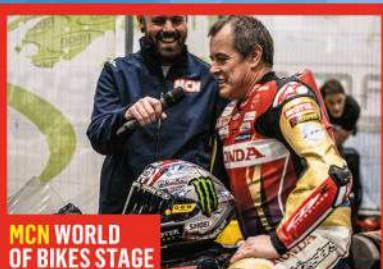
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Just look at it. With its wraparound, low-slung, Reynolds 531 frame, bolt-together Astralite wheels and that whacking great V-twin based on two pots from a Formula One car engine, the young and impressionable me thought the Hesketh V1000 was mega. Launched to the press by Lord Thomas Alexander Fermor-Hesketh in 1980 – with help from Mr Mike Hailwood, a brass band and much champagne – it would surely be the greatest British motorcycle of all time.

It wasn't. The V1000 was heavy, unreliable and expensive, and the company folded. It's now easy to roll out the cliché about this being typical of the British motorcycle industry. I'd argue it's not. Sure, home-brewed brands have enjoyed their share of bother over the years, but bikes with Union Flags have been the best in the world – and they still are. It's why a new Triumph has the bike market in a spin, and why we have their best-selling Speed 400 against key rivals this issue. The group test begins on page 52.

In fact, there have been so many epic British models over the

years that picking the best ever would be truly difficult... but we've had a bash anyway. Arguments and celebrations start on page 30. There's been world-beating engineering too, and our tame boffin Jamie Turner reveals his finest motors on page 74. I'm sure you won't agree with all our choices, so please let us know your counter arguments and personal picks – addresses are on page 27.

The Hesketh hasn't made it into any of the 'best ever' features, but this doesn't stop me secretly still quite fancying one. Convincing domestic management that £15,000 for a problematic old bike is a good idea is proving awkward, however (and please let's keep it between ourselves, I don't want any more ribbing).

Enjoy the issue.



Mike Armitage
Editor



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Team Bike

This magazine is made by the most talented team of bike journalists, writers and photographers in the universe. Here's what they've been doing this month.



1

The Bike family

No other publication or website is put together by as many experienced, knowledgeable and opinionated experts. Doesn't mean they always agree, though...

Britain's best ever, page 30



2

Mat Oxley

The world's most respected racing journo. Mat spots the stories no one else picks up on – like 'Diggi' being only MotoGP rider on a factory Ducati outside the works team.

The Oxley interview, page 44



3

Greg Moss

If you need someone to stand right next to a 200bhp bike and capture it launching, Greg is your man. He's not afraid of shoving his lens in rather interesting places.

Inside the Euro Finals, page 62



4

Carl Stevens

We still get excited by sportsbikes, but Carl takes enthusiasm to another level. Super-quick racer and owner of sharp haircut, his two-bike test is the one you can trust.

S1000RR v Blade, page 68



5

Jamie Turner

Ex-Norton, Cosworth and Lotus Engineering, professor Jamie is a leading authority on internal combustion. His pick of the greatest engines is eye-opening.

Britain's world beaters, page 74



6

Luke Brackenbury

Readers with fine memory will recall Luke as a picture researcher, writer and tester for *Bike*. He's back, bobbing up the country on a scooter. Inspirational amusement.

Adventure, page 80

EDITORIAL

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Tel: 01733 555161

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2. Instant warmth the moment you put it on

A standard baselayer traps body heat between your skin and the material, so it takes a little time before you feel the benefits. With ZeroFit, five separate fabrics, along with a patented knitting process, create instant warmth as soon as you pull it on. And, because of the construction of the garment, this heat is retained for the duration of your time on the bike, making it an essential piece of kit this winter.

3. Heating from top to toe this winter

Innovative 'Heat Threads' positioned on the inside of the garment gently rub against your skin and are activated upon even the smallest of movements, creating positive warmth across your body. We also make Heatrub Ultimate Leggings, Heatrub Ultimate Socks (Standard and Long options) and a Heatrub Ultimate Neckwarmer that are made from the same material and work in exactly the same way, so you can have top-to-toe warmth with ZeroFit.

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Geoff Hill, ZeroFit Ambassador and critically acclaimed author and adventurer

Glenn Irwin, ZeroFit Ambassador, BSB Star and the most successful superbike rider in the history of the North West 200



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5 BIKES THAT REALLY MATTER THIS MONTH



Elec' damper and much loveliness



Smart aero: wings move automatically

CHASSIS

Oval section steel trellis frame with machined alloy swingarm pivot plates. Everything is adjustable – head angle, ride height, swingarm pivot position, the lot.



WEIGHT SAVINGS

Bimota's extensive use of carbon fibre and machined alloy means the KB998 tips the scales at 194kg – which is 7kg lighter than ZX-10R.

ENGINE AND ELECTRONICS

Both exactly the same as the ZX-10R's. That means 197bhp at 13,600rpm and 82 lb.ft of torque at 11,700rpm, plus all the usual rider aids.

ADJUSTABLE AERO

The angle of the wings is automatically altered by the bike's ECU, depending how much downforce it thinks you need.

'It marks a new era'

New **Bimota KB998** shocks World Superbike paddock and has UK dealers frothing

When Kawasaki decided to hand over its World Superbike team slot to Bimota (which it owns), there was much befuddlement. Why would Kawasaki take such a risk? We now have the answers: a) because the new Bimota KB998 is seriously fast, and b) because WSB success could sell KB998s in a way it never did for ZX-10Rs.

The KB998 you see here is the road-going version of the race bike – Bimota must build 500 of them to be eligible for World Supers. In road trim it's essentially a standard 197bhp ZX-10R engine bolted into Bimota's handmade steel trellis frame adorned with high-end components and cloaked in the world's tastiest carbon fibre. The race bike has an identical frame, but a race-tuned engine.

'When Bimota riders Alex Lowes and Axel Bassani came top at the post-season WSB test in Jerez, that was massively important for us,' says Bimota UK's director, James Horton. 'Kawasaki would have got little or no publicity from coming 1-2 in a test – they don't need that platform. But for Bimota, it's important because there are a lot of people who don't know the brand, or regard it as an oddity. If we do well in WSB next year, it will have a massive impact, not just on the KB998, but other Bimotas too.'

One of the most interesting elements of the new bike is the electronically controlled aerodynamics. The ECU controls surfaces on the two main wings, so they can be adjusted to give more or less downforce. So, for example, they can be set to maximum while exiting corners to reduce wheelies, and then moved to the minimum setting on straights to reduce drag and improve top speed. They operate automatically with no intervention from the rider.

'We did many tests in the wind tunnel,' said Bimota Chief Operating Officer Pierluigi Marconi. 'This [the adjustable wings] can give us an advantage today because nobody else has them. We can have the best setting for every corner and at any speed. They function for braking, cornering, and high speed.'

The Bimota KB998's price is capped by the World Superbike homologation rules to 44,000 Euro (about £37,000), but James Horton has no doubts it will sell. 'This bike appeals to a much larger audience because it's got everything you expect from a motorcycle, with a lot of exotic materials. A lot of people didn't understand previous bikes such as the Tesi H2.

'Obviously the KB998 is a significant chunk of money, but I think it's actually good value. You're getting Tesi H2 build quality for £20,000 less and I suspect Bimota will make a loss on every KB998 they sell. I'm actually buying one with my own money because it's a special bike and marks a change in Bimota's story. It's where they went back into World Superbikes and – hopefully – won.'

Bikes are expected in dealers by April 2025.



[NEW BIKES]

Sauciest GS ever?

Tasty new **BMW F450GS** aims at tempting everyone from experienced GS owners craving less weight to trail riders and A2 licensees

As if there wasn't enough action in the 400cc bracket – Triumph's Speed 400 takes on its Royal Enfield and Zontes rivals on p52 – BMW have surprised everyone by revealing another one.

The new F450GS is the company's dirtiest dirt bike since the endurotastic G450X of 2009, though the new GS looks much more saucy and has a far wider appeal. BMW are pitching it as a practical trail bike that will also tempt A2 licence holders and experienced riders wanting GS looks and credibility without the humungous weight and price.

The all-new engine is a 450cc parallel twin making 47bhp. BMW have revealed precious little about the motor, but said in a statement it has a 'never-before-used ignition offset' that is believed to be 125°.

'This is a funny amount, that's for sure,' says *Bike's* engine guru Jamie Turner. 'If you have a balance shaft [we presume it has – Ed] you can pick any interval you like with a parallel twin and still arrive at good balance, so I don't think it's anything to do with that.'

'If it's genuinely ignition interval – rather than the angle between the crank pins, which would also allow 235/485° firing intervals – then it is probably intended to smooth out two impulses and blend them into a more continuous event as far as the tyre is concerned.'

Bike's suspicion is that like Triumph's T-plane crank, the novel ignition offset will be used by BMW to claim an advantage off-road, where the longer pauses between power pulses are meant to let the tyre regain grip. Combine this with the smoothness of a well-balanced twin that can cruise happily down motorways at 80mph and you have a genuinely versatile motorcycle.

BMW claim the GS weighs 175kg wet, making it A2 compliant (in conjunction with 47bhp) and putting it on a par with the popular CFMoto 450MT adventure bike and KTM's new 390 Adventure.

An indication that BM are aiming at off-road competence rather than dirt domination is the front wheel: it's 19in rather than the 21in favoured by those intent on smashing into boulders.

'It's not a heavy-duty dirt bike,' confirms BMW's UK product manager Steve Pitt. 'It's more for greenlaning. The prototype wheels are spoked, but we've been told that cast aluminium wheels [ie, road-orientated and a hell of a lot easier to clean] may also be an option. By having a 19in front wheel, it means buyers could specify which they want.'

'The idea with this bike is to get people's reaction, but as it's been so positive I hope we don't change it much at all. There's been a huge amount of interest. Price wise all I can say is it'll be between the G310GS and F800GS.' *Bike* estimates £7000 when it goes on sale late in 2025.

PROTOTYPE?

BMW say it's a prototype but it's clearly a lot further down the line than that – it looks finished, the dash works and BMW started one up at a show in Italy. BMW say it will launch in 2025.

WHEELS

19in front, 17in rear sums up the bike's purpose: light trails, all roads. BMW say cast wheels will be an option.

Direct link shock to encourage riders onto more scenic, traffic-free routes



Unmistakably a GS but with new-found 'grr'

SUSPENSION

Fully adjustable forks and a direct link shock (ie, there is no rising-rate linkage). Single front disc and radial caliper.

ELECTRONICS

BMW say it will get the full suite of GS goodness, although presumably in a series of packages. The TFT is a posh 6.5-incher.

CHASSIS

New steel trellis frame is completely different to the F310GS's (the 800 and 900 only use steel trellis for the subframe).

ENGINE

We only have basic info: 450cc, parallel twin, 47bhp, curious ignition timing. Magnesium cases might not make it to the finished bike.

Hang on, it's logical!

Historically, BMW have suffered from brain fade with their lower-capacity models, the daftness pinnacle being reached in 2008 by the F650GS that was actually 798cc. Not so much of that nonsense here:

	G310GS	F450GS	F800GS	F900GS	R1300GS
Price	£5890	£7000(est)	£9995	£11995	£16,640
Power	34bhp	47bhp	86bhp	103bhp	143bhp
Front wheel	19in	19in	19in	21in	19in
Wet weight	175kg	175kg	227kg	219kg	237kg

X-lamp is familiar. Rest of it less so

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[NEW BIKES]

No half measures

The new Morini 3½ is no cynical pastiche of a legendary model. For starters, it's powered by a real V-twin

Chinese companies rightfully get stick when they buy the rights of a famous motorbike brand, claim they love the heritage and then plonk a rip-off CB500 or ER-6 engine into the most famous model. So hats off to Znen – owners of Moto Morini – for developing a 350cc V-twin to power the new Morini 3½. In a world of 400cc parallel twins and singles, the 3½ looks – and will probably sound – pleasingly different.

The new motor shares little with the old 1974 job aside from the V, though even that is a different angle – now 60 degrees rather than the original's 72. There's also water-cooling instead of air, double overhead cams instead of single, and a higher compression ratio.

SUSPENSION

Non-adjustable upsidedown forks, preload-only adjustable shock. Frame is a steel cradle.

ENGINE

All-new 350cc water-cooled V-twin making 23 lb.ft at 6500rpm and 32bhp at 8500rpm.

Despite all that – and 50 years of materials technology advances – claimed power is actually down on the original, from 36 to 32bhp.

There are two likely reasons for this. Firstly, the new bike has a long-stroke engine that targets torque rather than peak power. And secondly, 1970s manufacturers were often not at home to Mr Truth. Morini's 500 V-twins usually dyno around the 35bhp mark, so realistically the old 350 would be lucky to make 30.

Everything else about the new 350 is as you'd expect: steel double cradle frame, 43mm non-adjustable upsidedown forks, preload-adjustable rear shock, single front brake disc with radial caliper, aluminium swingarm, and neat circular TFT dash. There was no information about electronics as *Bike* went to press, but from the clocks it looks like there aren't any apart from the obligatory ABS.

The price of the 3½ has yet to be announced, but since the Morini 6½ costs £5999, it's likely to be competitive.

Bikes will be available in the UK in Autumn 2025.

STYLING

The Morini blurb says it's a 'reinterpretation' of the original 3½ and we think they've got it bang on.



This, or a Speed 400 (page 52)?



Why the old one rocked

People of a certain age get dewy eyed about the original 3½ for good reason. In 1974 its light weight, frisky handling and thrashable V-twin made rivals feel clunky, podgy and old fashioned. The only problem was cost: when the 3½ launched it was almost as much as a Honda CB750. We can't see the new one falling into that sales pothole.



Blimey, done some miles

FRAME

Beautifully made steel trellis, lovingly TIG-welded together in Bolton.

New, classier, round display

HAVE I SEEN IT BEFORE?

Sort of. CCM's 2022 'Retro Trailie' concept looked remarkably similar.

ENGINE

Rorty 600cc single from the Spitfire, making 55bhp and 37 lb.ft of torque.

Classic trailie? Retro enduro? Cool whatever

[NEW BIKES]

Back to their roots

CCM reveal **Project X**, an off-road successor to the much-loved GP450

It's easy to forget what an off-road powerhouse CCM used to be. Back in 1977, for example, a couple of CCMs led the British motocross GP, keeping swarms of Japanese factory bikes behind them. They didn't ultimately win it, but the episode was enough to scare Honda Racing Corporation (HRC), who bought a CCM and took it back to Japan to forensically examine. And now the Bolton firm are heading back towards dirt with this, the Project X.

As with all recent CCMs, it's Spitfire based, with the same 600cc single-cylinder engine and TIG-welded steel frame as the popular road bike range. But thanks to a bigger fuel tank, long-travel suspension and new wheel sizes, Project X has become a serious off-road tool according to CCM.

'The Spitfire range has been really successful for us,' CCM's new managing director Jason Broome tells *Bike*. 'But CCM purists have

been asking for a bike that's closer to our roots, so naturally we wanted to deliver. But we needed to be practical at the same time. Developing a whole new bike will take years.

'In the meantime, we asked ourselves, "can we make our existing engine and chassis more targeted at our heritage?" The first problem was the fuel tank. If you want an enduro bike it's got to have sufficient range, but a fuel tank isn't something you can just knock up. It takes time. We've developed an injection-moulded plastic tank with a cover, just like a competition bike would have. We've also relocated the fuel pump to get an extra litre of fuel in. It's now between 17 and 18 litres, which equates to a 150-mile range.'

Apparently the other major request from long-standing CCM fans was an airbox – none of the Spitfire variants have one. 'Again, that was a challenge,' says Jason. 'But we've done it. Along with the long-travel WP suspension, 21in front wheel and 18in rear, plus sump guard and new mudguards, it's resulted in a capable enduro bike. Each one will be made to order, so customers can specify whether they want them in enduro or road trim.'

The Project X will cost £13,995 when it arrives in June 2025.

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[NEW BIKES]

Break out the flares!

Groovy new **BMW R12S** expertly channels the 1973 R90S and makes us wish we had £18,460 knocking about

Yes it's essentially an R12 nineT in a 1970s frock, but what a frock. The simple addition of a nose fairing and some Daytona Orange paint has turned the confusingly-named naked into one of the coolest new bikes of 2025.

It's a clever trick because it doesn't actually look much like the bike it's paying homage to. The 1973 R90S was famous for its svelte, delicate styling and two-tone paint that misted together to create a unique custom-esque look. By comparison, the new R12S looks bigger, denser and way more imposing. And yet...

'Defining design elements include the handlebar-mounted cockpit fairing with the tinted windshield,' says BMW Design head Alexander Buckan, 'plus the seat with contrast stitching, and the Lava Orange metallic paint finish as a nod to the R90S Daytona Orange from 1975. The design is complemented by details such as the red-laid "S" on the side covers, the red double line, and the brushed and clear-lacquered aluminum surfaces of the tank and seat hump.'

The Daytona Orange is an important reference for the American market, where the R90S scored some unlikely race victories (the R90S was an air-cooled pushrod twin facing off against far more sophisticated motors). In 1976 Steve McLaughlin and Reg Pridmore came first and second in the Daytona 200 Superbike race and Pridmore went on to win the AMA Superbike title on his R90S. The win helped transform BM's old duffer reputation.

In an attempt to bestow the new R12S with some of that hand-crafted racer vibe, BMW have thrown the accessory book at it. As standard, it gets all manner of CNC-machined goodies including ignition coil covers, levers, pillion footrests and mirrors. There's also a heap of electronics: hill start control, quickshifter, cruise control, and adaptive cornering lights are all standard.

Beneath all that it's a plain old R12 NineT which, curiously enough, was updated in 2023 to include more nods to the R90S. At the time, design chief Edgar Heinrich said: 'The purist design language is dominated by the clear tank/seat/rear line, in the style of the traditional /5 or the legendary R90S of the '70s. The new R12 nineT also features side covers in the area of the frame triangle in the authentic Roadster look – another reminiscence of BMW motorcycles of the 1970s.' So perhaps it's not so surprising that the new R12S hangs together so well. It's expected in showrooms in February 2025, priced at £18,460.

'BMW have thrown the accessory book at it'



1973 R90S was black – the iconic Daytona Orange came in 1975



R90S looked sun-bleached; R12S is more defined. Still ace

Choose your super retro

BMW isn't the only manufacturer capable of rifling through its back catalogue

	BMW R12S	Yamaha XSR900 GP	Kawasaki Z900RS
Price	£18,460	£12,506	£12,099
Power	107bhp	119bhp	112bhp
Weight	211kg	200kg	215kg



CHASSIS

Tubular steel frame holds fully adjustable 45mm forks, a cast aluminium swingarm (containing the shaft drive) and a shock with rebound and preload adjustability.



ELECTRONICS

Loads, including Rain, Road and Dynamic riding modes, engine brake control, traction control and hill hold control.

ENGINE

Standard R12 NineT, so 109bhp from the 1170cc air/oil cooled boxer with radial valves and central balancer shaft.

WHY SO PRICEY?

Well, the base R12 NineT is £14,420, and the R12S gets around £2000 of Option 719 billet parts as standard, plus the £980 Comfort Pack (heated grips, cruise control etc), £550 wheels and £200 cornering lights...

Head to head

New bikes versus our dyno, scales and datalogger

Keenly priced Voge comes with plenty of extras...



VOGE | BMW DS900X | F800GS

Loncin make BMW's parallel twins and now offer a cut-price adventurer based on the German. Badged as Voge, how's it compare to the bike it nicks bits from?

By Chris Newbigging

...while paying for the BMW name means fewer trinkets and baubles



Centre: the big oily noisy bit is shared between 'em



Left and right: bits borrowing stretches to the calipers

VOGE DS900X

BMW F800GS

89bhp

POWER

81bhp

It's the same 895cc parallel twin that BMW use. Claim is 94bhp, so not too far off – and more than the pricier donor in F800GS spec.

A bit down on the 86bhp claim. Not a 'natural' tune like the DS900X (or the F900GS that shares the motor) – it's held back electronically.

65 lb.ft

TORQUE

63 lb.ft

Torque curve is slightly wavy. But motor is juicy and you rarely notice those slight dips. Out-grunts the BMW, too. Shame about the kilos...

Bit less than the Voge, but it has more below 4500rpm and a smoother delivery. The BMW also has less bulk to shove along.

270kg

WEIGHT

234kg

Someone's been at the buffet. Extensive standard kit comes with a price – this is on par with a kitted-up R1250GSA or Multi' V4 Rally.

The 800 is relatively weighty for such a simple bike. Hard to see the Voge's extra kit amount to the 36kg weight difference, though.

50mpg

MPG

60mpg

Not bad economy, especially given the Voge's portliness. But the lighter (and admittedly softer-tuned) BMW is clearly more frugal.

Refined fuelling and polite tune mean the twin doesn't drink much. You get further on its 15-litre tank than the Voge's 17-litre.

121mph

TOP SPEED

119mph

Plenty to be getting on with, ta. Long gears and chubbiness mean that while the DS900X is ultimately faster, the F800GS is perkier.

A fraction slower, but it's all a tad academic. What really matters is the lighter BMW being the chirpier offering – see full data below.

£9199

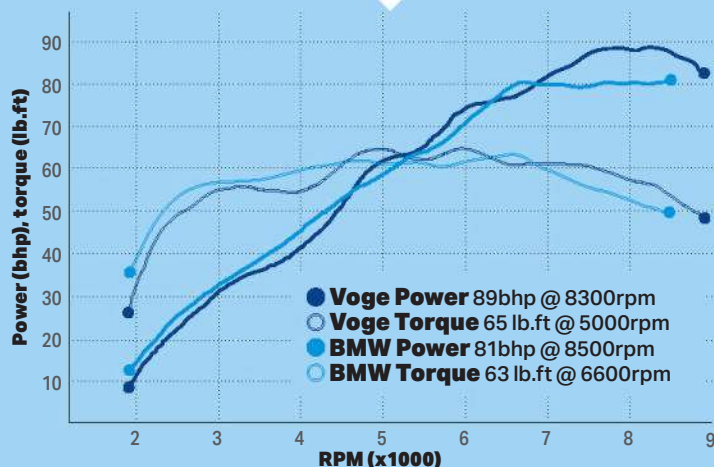
PRICE

£9995

Cheaper than a base BMW, but has panniers, heated grips, seat, even a dashcam. Built by folk who make BMWs, you can't deny the value.

Going German costs £800 more. But this is bum-basic guise – if you spec the F800GS close to the Voge it comes to £14,000...

ON THE DYNO



Testing notes: BMW's fuelling is more refined, and in the lower half of the revs – the bit you use most – it has the edge. Voge's top-end advantage countered by the bike's weight and tall gears.

AT THE PROVING GROUND

VOGE		BMW
5.1s	0-60MPH	3.6s
13.1s @ 105.6mph	1/4 MILE	12.2s @ 108.8mph
57.9m	70-0MPH	58.9m
9.7s	40-80 ROLL-ON	7.8s

Testing notes: The Voge's extra weight, drag and higher gearing punish it everywhere; the BMW might be the 'soft' version of the engine, but it's livelier to ride. Surprisingly, the heavier Chinese bike stops in less distance – more weight is transferred by longer suspension, helps the tyre grip, and stops the ABS joining in.

GET IN GEAR

The latest word in swanky riding gear, desirable bolt-ons and must-have goodies for your pride and joy

By Lyle Armitage



PRICE
£129.99

▣ Oxford Canyon MS Boots

WHAT IS IT? We've all seen casual or even trainer-style bike boots. You've probably got a pair. And now you can get a pair that look like walking boots. Protection has the higher CE 2 certification for abrasion, impact and rigidity, they're waterproof, and there's a deeply treaded grippy sole in case you need to climb a hillside.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? Good protection, and they're waterproof, so that's the essentials sorted. The classic lace-up fastening will mean a nice, snug fit, and they don't look bikey at all – if that matters to you. If they actually work as walking boots, imagine how much better trudging around Silverstone will be.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM? £129.99 oxfordriderwear.com

» Merlin Curborough heated glove

WHAT IS IT? Made from ripstop nylon and pretend leather, the Curborough is a waterproof CE 1 KP certified touring glove with a three-step heating system. The digit-warming tech is also shared in a full-leather retro style mitt called the Minworth. Armour by D3O as well.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? We're impressed by seemingly everything that comes out of Brit firm Merlin. Editor Armitage has some regular gloves and a single-layer riding shirt, and loves 'em. We like the easily accessible heat control and the pull-tight liner, so you can just wang them over jacket sleeves (no one enjoys tucking in gloves).

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM?

£229.99 merlinbikegear.com



PRICE
£229.99

New stuff

Clobber for you and your motorcycle



PRICE
£599

« Dainese Smart Air

WHAT IS IT? The latest evolution of Dainese's airbag vest, this can be slipped underneath or over the top of your common-or-garden bike jacket. The airbag section protects your back, neck and chest. The integrated gas generator can be replaced independently after a spill.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? Light weight, low key, can be worn under or over kit, and pretty much guaranteed to keep you protected with its triple-activation bag. What's not to like? Maybe the price...

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM? £599 dainese.com

» SHAD Pro Tank Bag

WHAT IS IT? Part of their 'click system' range, this has a nine-litre capacity that can expand to 12. Dual locks keep your gubbins safe, and it attaches to the tank ring with a quick-release model-specific mounting kit (an extra £12.99). A waterproof cover and padded shoulder strap are included.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? Tank bags aren't as popular as they used to be, but this is neat: big enough to be useful, not so vast as to get in the way, and comes away quickly for refuelling. And it has locks too, keeping your wallet/phone/tabs/packed lunch safe while you pop for a comfort break.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM?

£105.99 shad.co.uk



PRICE
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» Shark Dark Shadow Collection

WHAT IS IT? Shark have new 'Dark Shadow' colours on four of their lids: the Skwal i3, D-Skwal 3, Spartan RS, and RS Jet. The matte finish is available in black or grey, with more of the firm's range planned to get the treatment.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? Lots of people still go for a plain black or plain white helmet. Fair enough. But speaking as an image-conscious teen, these simple new colours look awesome – the grey with the (included) black visor is amazing. How to look with-it and classy at the same time.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM?

From £219.99 nevis.uk.com



FROM
£219.99

FROM
£46



« Desert Fox Fuel Cells

WHAT IS IT? Foldable fuel holders in a trio of sizes (three, six or 20 litres) for adventurous folk. Made of Cordura with a nylon bladder. Have multiple attachment points for strapping to your bike and an extending spout.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? Fold-up fuel cans? Brilliant. Didn't even know they were a thing. Most handy if you're heading to rough, remote terrain, and like the military looks, too. Also handy for bringing a take-home back from the pub (probably).

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM?

From £46 nippynormans.com

» Daytona Heated Grips

WHAT IS IT? The latest version of Daytona's popular hand warmers. Integrated control on the left-hand grip, four heat settings with disco-tastic multi-coloured LEDs, plus a handy 'quick heat' function.

WHAT DO WE LIKE? Heated kit is unbeatable if you're a serious cold-weather rider, but trad' heated grips are still ace for keeping the chill off your hands when you encounter unplanned cooler weather in un-bulky gloves. Like the easy built-in controller and rapid heat whatsit.

HOW MUCH AND WHERE FROM?

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PRICE
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'Trad' heated grips still ace for keeping chill off your hands'

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[BEEN THERE, GOT THE T-SHIRT]

'Memories of a great year'

In 1973-74 several Vauxhall apprentices joined the Toddington and District MCC. Most weekends we marshalled club meetings, mainly at Brands Hatch and Snetterton. Highlights in '74 were the Hutchinson 100 (reverse way around Brands) and Silverstone John Player Grand Prix. At Silverstone we had to park our bikes in the centre of the circuit, riding part-way round the track then the remainder to leave. Flat out on a 250cc BSA C15 is

fun except when it comes to hard wet braking... Marshals were given T-shirts, except it rained all day so we had to keep our Belstaffs on. Amazing racing from the great riders and their bikes of the time – Phil Read, Barry Sheene, Paul Smart, Chas Mortimer, Mick Grant, Dave Croxford, Peter Williams... the list goes on. Every time the T-shirt comes out it brings memories of a great year of marshalling. **Peter Eastland**

IF YOU'VE GOT AN OLD T-SHIRT LIKE PETER'S AND FANCY SEEING IT IN *BIKE*, TAKE A PICTURE OF THE WHOLE SHIRT, ARMS INCLUDED, AND EMAIL IT TO THE ADDRESS AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE. IF WE PUBLISH IT WE'LL SEND YOU A NEW T-SHIRT.



[STAR LETTER]

‘Noughties investments: too soon?’

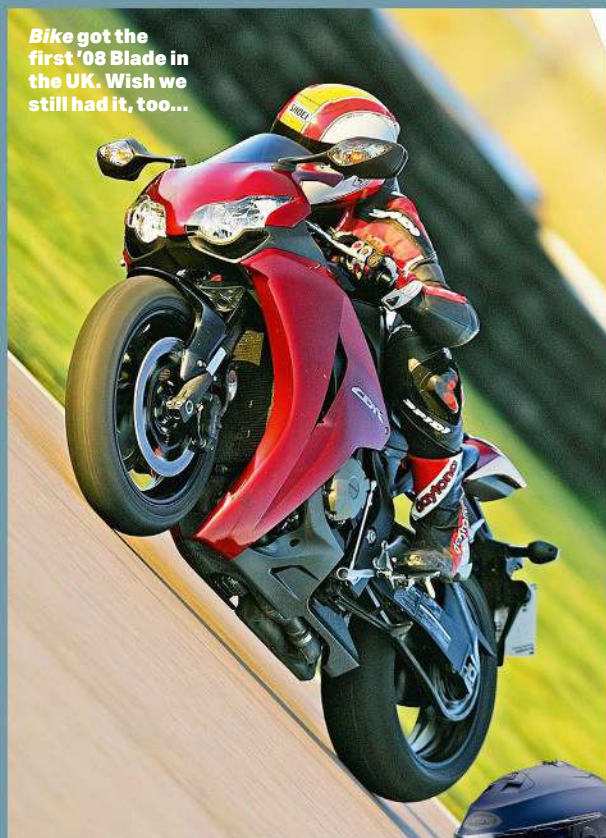
Your recent, excellent edition covering the rising popularity of ‘90s sportsbikes has got me thinking: is it too soon to be looking towards the Noughties for the next low-budget, high-fun, high-reward investment?

As a (slightly) younger chap, my era of nostalgia was the Noughties, and in dreaming of future investments I find myself browsing through fleabay at myriad Speed Triples, R1s, GSX-Rs, ZX-10Rs, even Ducati 1000SSs... for less than £5k. Surely these will follow the trend of the ‘90s bikes? Last of the non-traction control, non-TFT era...

My choice? 2008 Honda Fireblade, maroon, gold wheels, every time. I just need to sell the idea to the wife...

Sam Hodson, Bath

2008 Blade all day, 2006 Triumph Daytona (in yellow, see p35), get in quick with a Ducati 749S... I'll blame you when Mrs A complains at my next purchase. MA



EACH MONTH WE GIVE AWAY A CABERG DUKE II HELMET AND A YEAR'S SUBSCRIPTION TO BIKE FOR THE MONTH'S STAR LETTER. ON YOUR MARKS



What the dickens

In response to Edwin Swannick's letter, *Peak writing* (Bike, January). Another amusing analogy from the *Head to Head* in the January issue made me chuckle when describing the 2024 CBR600RR as needing to be 'caned like a Victorian pickpocket'.

Amazing how little has changed in more than 20 years of development.

Rob Simpson, Rossendale



Being a GS-ist doesn't have to mean big boxer

will lift, allowing unfiltered oil past. If KTM have identified the problem as oil-borne debris blocking cam feed jets (which I also believe is the cause) that would account for the small number and random nature of the failures, confirmed by the introduction of the new strainer after which the problems (as far as we know) went away.

Des Senior

Faith no more

I bought a 2020 KTM 790 Duke and very much enjoyed it. But seeing the stories of the cheese camshafts on the internet and lobes 4-5mm deep on a 16,000-mile bike was worrying.

More worrying was a bulletin I read from KTM. It said if the wear wasn't too bad, to clean it. How do you clean a camshaft? It's meant to be made of hardened steel; if it can be cleaned it obviously isn't fit for purpose.

I lost all faith in KTM and sold my Duke as I was afraid I'd end up with a bike with next to no second-hand value or one that would need fixing at my expense. KTM should have recalled all affected bikes and sorted it straight away.

Geoff Bennett

Already did it

The final sentence of John Fortescue's letter (Bike, December 2024) made me smile. 'Maybe BMW should launch an R600GS.' They did – the F650GS.

Mine is a 2001 model (single spark), which I found on eBay in 2016 having decided to get back into biking after a gap of 35 years or so. I paid £1500 for it and it's been a joy to own and ride, punching well above its weight.

It has now done 32,000 miles, and passers-by still stop to admire the bike and ask me if it's new.

Chris Lukaszewicz

'Sibling' shock

I've been reading my dad's copies of *Bike* since I learned to read, mainly because there's always been at least one copy on our kitchen table at any given time. While I never took up riding, I've still loved to read it.

One of my dad's Sion's proudest moments during my History of Art degree was when I submitted an essay on the Harley-Davidson Museum's display strategies – my somewhat bemused tutor was expecting something normal about paintings.

Anyway, now in my early 20s and moved out, imagine the excitement when I pick up the December issue featuring a paragraph from my dad about his VFR800. The bike has been a treasured part of our family longer than I have, and it was so special that he got to share it with your readers.

Also imagine my surprise to find out that my parents went out riding less after their kids (multiple) arrived – here I was, thinking I was their only one! Thanks for the heads up!

Best wishes, and thank you for the laugh we've all had.

Carys Owen

It's the wee things

I'll happily admit that I don't read every single word of your mag; I only really glance over specs and tech data. That said, the Aprilia RS660 colour schemes in December issue's group test did catch my eye. Pissy gold?

It's the little things that keep you coming back for more.

Andrew Laughton, Herefordshire

Duc-ing it out

What were Ducati's MotoGP team doing? We all know many teams have a number one rider and a number two. The number one gets the best bits and that's the way it works; we've



Sion, racking up more VFR miles in search of some extra kids

all heard the stories. So, to go and give another team the best bits too is crazy.

When it comes to world championship sports, the prize money, kudos and sponsors demand a win. Then to let them race equally without some clause in the contract small print to favour the factory is quite unthinkable. No other sport at that level would ever do that in their worst nightmare. It just wouldn't be allowed.

Wonderful, wasn't it?

Jim McCarter, Bristol

Tiger tale

Against a media backdrop of societal problems this week, I thought I'd take a life-affirming ride on my Triumph Tiger 800XC. I decided on a favourite – a lap of Loch Earn.

Reassuring hum of the triple below me, my senses were immediately freed by the cool, damp Scottish air, temperature dropping as I wound my way up and over Comrie Moor, threading the stunning patchwork of autumnal colours. Joy was no further away than a familiar, fast series of bends, eyes fixed on the horizon while grips sent waves of warmth through my digits keeping nerve endings connected to bars and levers.

I pull into my drive, head clear, equilibrium restored, senses renewed. The NHS should prescribe this...

Dan Curtis

Keep it up

I'm currently laid up with a bad (non-biking-related) injury, thinking wistfully of the opportunities I passed up to ride over the summer months.

However, your December issue landed on the doormat and brought me an enormous amount of pleasure. An utterly brilliant edition of a great magazine, one that very much lifted my spirits. Keep up the good work.

Matt Nicoll

Martin (left) beat factory rider Bagnaia to the MotoGP crown. Kudos to Ducati for letting them race



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Britain's BEST-EVER BIKE

With an endless list of iconic models churned out by legendary brands, picking the greatest motorcycle adorned with a Union Flag is no easy task. We rope in a selection of experts and have a crack anyway

Words *The Bike* extended family

Where do you start? Since Coventry-based Excelsior first screwed together a 'motor-bicycle' in 1896 there's been a list of British manufacturers as long as a long person's arm.

Many are lost to time – you won't have sat on the latest model from Champion, Martinsyde or Grindlay Peerless at the NEC this year – but others have legendary status. They were responsible for making Britain the capital of the motorcycle world. Some are still at it. The two-wheel conveyances they've created have dominated sales, ruled racing, touched hearts and shaped biking. (And, admittedly, some of them have been awful, but rough with the smooth and all that.)

We assembled a gaggle of journalists, authors, road testers and hangers-on to try to decide which machine represents the British peak. Not easy.

However, filtering so many wondrous bikes is made easier with a few ground rules. Newer bikes are better than older ones, which is why we're not riding round on rigid-framed boneshakers with total-loss lubrication and two-speed hand-shift gearboxes. So, the judges were encouraged to vote for bikes from within *Bike*'s lifetime – 1971 onwards – and to remember that bikes from 2000-on have performance, handling, comfort and reliability that are light years ahead of a 1959 Ariel Leader.

Once the protests and arm-waving had eventually calmed down, each of the panel fed their top three into the office Amstrad CPC464 which peeped, gurgled and churned out the overall top ten. Some vintage tackle slipped through because, well... you'll see why. The experts champion their choices on the following pages. Please write in to argue – the addresses are on page 27...

[Your experts]

Your flag-waving panel of expert wisdom and questionable opinion



Tim Thompson

Ex-editor, loves modern bikes, bored by old ones



Richard Fincher

Owens an old Brit twin, ex-*Bike* editor



Roland Brown

Testing bikes since vertically split cases



Mike Armitage

Editor, full-on motorcycle nerd



Martin Fitz-Gibbons

Ex-*Bike* road tester, owns a massive brain



Phil West

Author, journalist, ex-*Bike* editor



John Westlake

Proper journo since the '90s, font of wisdom



Michael Neeves

Tests bikes for *MCN*, ridden literally 1000s



Mark Williams

Founder of this very pamphlet

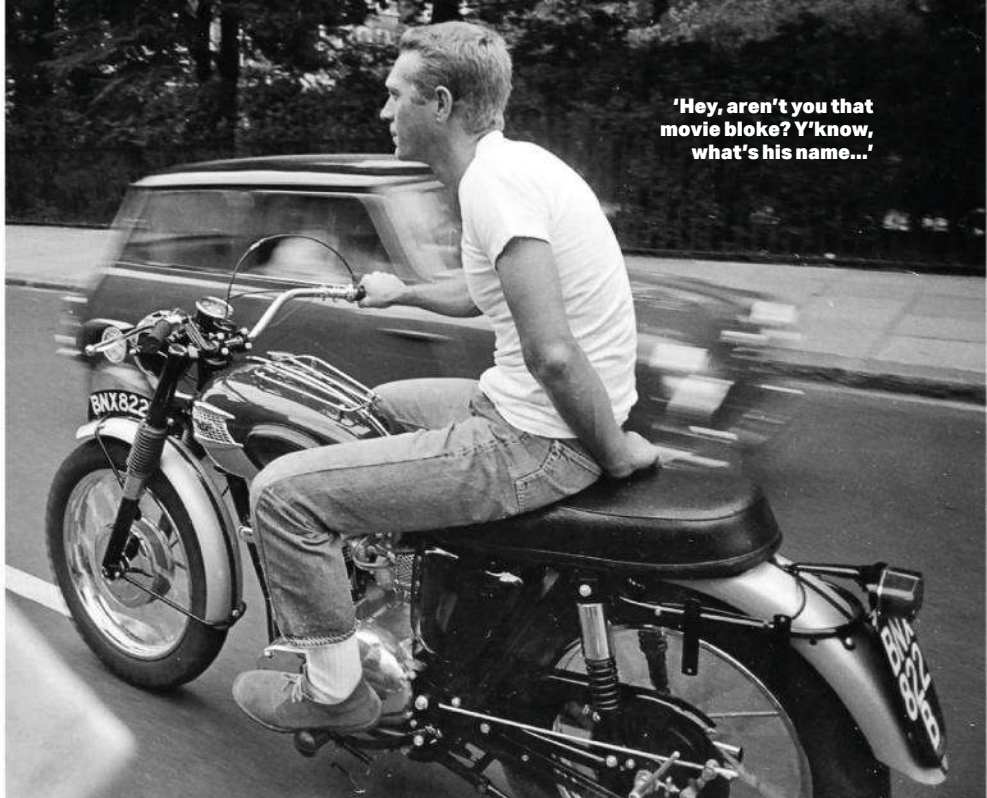


John Urry

Used-machine expert and serial bike buyer

10 Triumph TR6 Trophy

» Steve McQueen was cool because he was an anti-hero movie star who smoked fags, could have been a professional racing car driver, and looked good in Persol sunglasses. But mainly because he ripped up California on Triumph 650s – Meriden's parallel twin was the thudder of choice for US desert sleds. The competition version won the cross-discipline AMA title, dominated American off-road racing from the '50s until the '70s, and was a force in the International Six Days Trial. McQueen raced in the ISDT for the US team in 1964 on one. It's the bike he rode in *The Great Escape* and the reason Triumph were so hip in the '60s. Oh, and the police version was known as the Saint: Stop Anything In No Time. **Mike Armitage**



'Hey, aren't you that movie bloke? Y'know, what's his name...'

Norton F1

» Unlike so much post-50s Brit iron it didn't feel like it was made of the stuff. Light, balanced, strong, smooth and – again like so much from the pre-Bloor era – unresolved. But bold, brilliant and a proper treat (when they worked). It could have been a... (add your 'world-beating' cliché derivative here). **Richard Fincher**

Steve Spray, Norton F1, Brands Hatch, 1990. You can hear the howl

Surely the pinnacle of British innovation, eccentricity and bloody-mindedness. And the racer won! **John Westlake**

If I did the lottery, and if I then won, this is what I'd rush out and blow the first lump on. With a deafening race-style ejector exhaust. Obviously. **Mike Armitage**



Norton Commando

» I bought a Commando when I turned 40. All old bikes shake and lack finesse, but there are nuances. It has a *slightly* tighter, sharper feel than a BSA, Matchless or Triumph twin. The isolastic frame damps vibration from violent to quirky. It's small and low, yet the feel is Big Bike. Massy flywheels throw it forwards as the clutch bites. Low-rev surge is like a Harley minus the weight. Speed builds with sound and fury. Slowing lacks poise, so you avoid it. A thin frame, skinny suspension and deep tyres flex and form themselves, tracking incredibly true to hold a line under light throttle. You flow. Cross-country riding is... fun. I know why riders thought these were great. I still do.

Richard Fincher

'Small and low, yet Big Bike feel. Low-rev surge like a Harley minus the weight... Riders thought these were great. I still do'



8 1948 Vincent Rapide Series C

» Fast, fine-handling, stylish, cleverly engineered V-twin – a superbike decades before anyone used that word about the Honda CB750. **Roland Brown**

Vincent's 998cc V-twin engine – which used a modest tune, huge torque and long gearing to achieve record-breaking speed – is legendary. From 1946 it featured unit construction with their own gearbox (it would break bought-in transmissions) and

BONHAMS



with 45bhp hurled the Rapide to 110mph. But the chassis is more impressive. Vincent used the motor as a stressed member, doing

Thrillingly 'rapide' in its 1940s heyday – and just as impressive today

away with down tubes, and had properly damped swingarm rear suspension hung from the rear of the motor. Like a Ducati Panigale but more than 60 years earlier (and with the frame doubling as the oil tank, too).

The Rapide C also had Girder forks with springs alongside the fork blades and a central damper, for unrivalled ride quality. Ride one today and it's still stable, agile and balanced. A bloke near me has one. I struggle to keep up with him. **Mike Armitage**

6 1968 BSA Rocket 3

» The original push-rod triple beat the Norton Commando hands-down in our original Giant Test, back in 1971. Smoother and faster. **Mark Williams**

BSA's across-the-frame three wasn't genius engineering – it was effectively Triumph's 498cc T100 Tiger engine (Triumph were part of the BSA group) with another cylinder wedged in. Wasn't a showroom success either (nor was the version badged as the Triumph Trident). But the Rocket was a race sensation. The Daytona 200 was the event to win, and in 1971 the factory sent a swarm of top-name riders – Gary Nixon, Mike Hailwood, Dave Aldana, Gene Romero, Don Emde, Paul Smart, Dick Mann – on factory-prepped bikes with Rob North frames. Mann won, Romero was second (Triumph-badged bike) and Emde was third. They wiped the floor. Triples ruled the Brit championships and Production TT, too.

Apparently, the Rocket 3 was delayed while BSA fuffed over styling, by which time the Honda CB750 was about to appear and reset the datum. But I love how the square tank and ray-gun pipes of the Ogle-designed early bikes broke with convention. There's so much more to classic British iron than yet another cranky twin. **Mike Armitage**



MALCOLM CARLING



Those pipes. The engine. That tank. Er... and those bungees? Who left them?

Triumph Speed Triple

» Pick a number, any number. From the first-generation 885cc chunky ripper – also the first proper 'sportsbike without a fairing', what we now know as a supernaked – to the current ballisto-mobile, Speed Triples have defined desirable off-beat nudity for three decades. They've matured exceptionally well, getting funner as the years progress.

We all love a bike that starts a movement.

Richard Fincher

Dense, planted, dense, fast, dense.

Tim Thompson

Brilliant idea, styled in a shed (the original, by Mockett), fabulous engine, created a genre (kinda). **John Westlake**

Think 'modern Triumph' and a Speed Triple pops into your head. Specifically, any of the epic 1050cc models. They defined the brand. Nothing manages to combine the sense of heavy engineering with the sort of precision that'd win a game of *Operation* quite like the Speed Triple. It was Triumph's bestseller for yonks. There's a reason. **Mike Armitage**



Original '94 Speed triple has timeless appeal. Bike helmet paint a bit less so

Triumph Daytona 675

» The first British bike of my lifetime that could stand toe-to-toe with the best in the world and be called 'fantastic' without the caveat 'for a British bike'. Arrived just as supersports was on the way out, which was a shame, but its legacy is that it begat the Street Triple and, I guess, the mid-capacity Tigers, both of which went

on to be arguably even more successful. But the Daytona was the bike that made it possible. Beautiful to look at, stunningly capable to ride, original in concept and execution – and while it shouldn't matter, it really was built in Britain. Personal highlight is the 2011 Daytona 675R (Öhlins, white bodywork, underseat exhaust), but

credit where it's due: its existence, and much of Triumph's success in the past 20 years, is down to the 2006 original. In Scorched Yellow. **Martin Fitz-Gibbons**

Startlingly brilliant, even now. The bike I'd own if my back functioned properly. And *Bike* got the world scoop. **John Westlake**

'Triumph's success in the past 20 years is down to the 2006 original. In Scorched Yellow'



Bike was invited as the first folk outside Triumph to see the Daytona. This is from that photo shoot. Still makes us go wow...

3 BSA Bantam

» In the 1930s, German brand DKW designed a 123cc two-stroke single. The RT125 made about four and a half horsepower and could eventually reach 50mph with a helpful breeze. After World War II the plans and tooling were taken as reparations and the design was used for the Minsk 125, Harley-Davidson Hummer, Yamaha YA-1, MZ 125, and many others. One of which was the BSA Bantam.

While you could argue the Bantam is therefore German, it was the British firm that made the design a success. A huge hit in post-war Blighty as affordable, reliable and practical transport, the BSA morphed into an effective off-road tool, army bike and even a road racer. Evolving through

various forms, sprouting proper suspension and growing to 175cc, the wee Bantam was in production from 1948 until 1971 (and only disappeared due to BSA's financial woes). With something like 500,000 made, surely no other British bike has touched so many people. **Mike Armitage**



Amaranth Red? Classy.
Turner was the stylist
as well as the engineer

1937 Triumph 5T Speed Twin

» The clean-sheet genius of Edward Turner that dragged British motorcyclists and motorcycles kicking and screaming out of the single-cylinder swamp and towards the multi-cylinder promised land. Lighter, more powerful and smoother than the existing singles, it pointed the way forward.

Awkwardly launched shortly before the world started blowing itself up, which led to the flattening of Triumph's Coventry factory. Post-war, the Speed Twin's very existence provided Triumph the means to recover. Without it, there might not be a British bike industry today. **Martin Fitz-Gibbons**

Fast, agile, unprecedented power and revs. But the Speed Twin was also manageable. Easier to start than lumpy singles, the engine was slimmer than the 493cc one-pot in Triumph's existing Tiger 90 and gave a light, tossable bike. It was affordable, costing just a fiver more than the Tiger 90 it immediately outdated. And it was reliable. The Met Police bought a fleet and by the mid-1940s the average odometer showed nearly 100,000 miles. The 5T shaped Brit bikes for the next half-century: the final Meriden Bonneville in 1988 (made under licence by Les Harris) had roots in this bike. **Mike Armitage**



Martin Fitz-Gibbons on a then-new Street Triple
in *Bike's* 2008 group
test. Of course it won...



‘Their original 675cc model was so groundbreaking – it totally rewrote what a naked middleweight should be’

Triumph Street Triple

» My increasingly fuddled mind can't recall what I had for lunch yesterday, yet a late summer ride in 2007 remains vivid. *Bike* was invited to test a pre-production Street Triple (but, oddly, couldn't tell anyone). I followed a Triumph test rider – who was intent on avoiding front tyre wear – on dappled British B-roads and whooped with joy. The bike was fast and feisty, yet flexible and friendly. Its chassis danced between hedgerows and could be steered just with my fingertips. It made my insides go mushy. Sounded fit, too.

Biking was becoming increasingly serious and stern-faced, yet here was a machine for which the design brief had clearly just said 'JOY' in huge letters. I remember thinking the Street Triple was the most fun I'd had on a new bike in yonks and would surely be a huge success. And it was. **Mike Armitage**

Their original 675cc was groundbreaking – it totally rewrote what a naked middleweight should be, injecting the whole class with sportiness and excitement. **Jon Urry**

That first Street Trip' had the style and much of the pace of the defining Speed Triple, with the agility and value of the Daytona 675. The best of the brilliant trio. **Roland Brown**

It was the first Hinckley Triumph that was truly a world-beater. Although the R model from 2009 was even better. **Phil West**

The current RS is the ultimate evolution of that engine and chassis; a marvel on track yet civilised on the road. **Michael Neeves**

Too much of a
good thing?
No chance

**‘I love it so
much I’ve
had four!’**



Don't just take our word for it. As far as serial owner **Karen Poppleton** is concerned, there's nothing finer than Triumph's Street Triple

Words Phil West



Up to the top of Grossglockner on the sporty 765 RS



My first bike was a Honda CBR125R, which I rode for four months. After that I tested Honda's CBR650F, CBR600RR and CB600, and a Triumph Speed Triple. I'm only 5ft 3in so found many bikes too tall and heavy. I then went to my local Triumph dealer and tested a Street Triple 675 – and loved it. I could touch the floor, and it was light enough to give me confidence. I bought it there and then.

'After two years, I bought a 2017 Street Triple 765 RS. Wow. What a difference. The one thing I didn't like on the 675 was the snatchy throttle. Thinking back, it was probably inexperience, but with the 765 the throttle was fly-by-wire and so much smoother. There was more power, too...

'My RS is currently on 37,000 miles. I ride about 12,000 miles a year and have been to the Isle of Man, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and Austria. I've even been known to do a coast-to-coast ride just for a chippy dinner. I've had a Triumph screen fitted – being totally open to the elements is the downside of a naked bike, but I wouldn't swap it.

'I now own three Street Triples, which shows how much I love them. As well as my 765, I bought a Moto2 Edition in 2023 as it was a bit special, then this year decided I loved the RS in Cosmic Yellow so bought one of those as well... The two newest are noticeably different: the yellow one feels taller, and I love the riding position of the Moto2 with its clip-on bars. And they're both a lot smoother than the earlier bike. The only accessories are engine sliders, bobbins, clutch guard (yellow), carbon bits to the Moto2 and carbon sleeve to the Cosmic Yellow, and all three have tail ties. My first 765 will be used over winter, the Cosmic Yellow over summer, and the Moto2 comes out a couple of times a year.

'I also own a Honda C90, VFR400 and RVF400, but I've no plans to sell any of the Triumphs... I tried a few others – Aprilia Tuono Factory, Honda Hornet, Yamaha MT-09 – to see if I can break my Street Triple bug, but I always go back to the Triumphs.

'If you're thinking of a naked the Street Triple is a must. Build quality is second to none, I love the sound, and they're flickable, nimble and effortless to corner.' **Bike**



The 675 model that started the whole thing

Britain's BEST-LOVED...

...helmet, and biker café, and race meeting, and more. Here's motorcycling's most popular everything of the past 12 months (and beyond)

Which helmet is the UK's favourite? What race meeting has the biggest crowd, and which place for food, tea and bike-based banter is the most popular? To try to find the best by any sort of credible yardstick, we've applied some 'science' and, where not available, asked the experts in their field and referred to suitable polls to find out the best-sellers and biggest award winners. Here are the most popular of all in 10 of the most popular motorcycling categories...

Used dealer: Superbike Factory

■ Phil Martin, manager for MCN's dealer team sales: 'They'll never win an overall Dealer of the Year award because they only deal with second-hand bikes and a few new 125s. But I would say they're the biggest dealer in terms of used bikes – and the UK's biggest in terms of overall numbers.'

Bridewell and Ryde served up a Brands Hatch thriller



BSB round: Brands Hatch finale

■ Race meetings are all about attendance figures, but TV viewer numbers are also important – although exact numbers are often (and annoyingly) highly guarded for commercial reasons.

'We wouldn't give crowd figures,' explains Laura Stevens, media and PR for the British Superbike championship. 'But traditionally, the top three rounds in terms of crowd would be Brands Hatch finale, Cadwell Park (August bank holiday), and the first visit to Oulton Park.' And TV/Eurosport figures? 'The viewing figures usually correspond the same, however Donington Park second visit was high, too.'

Mondial: well made, effective, 200 quid. Sold



Speed 400: a huge sales, er, triumph

New bike: Triumph Speed 400

■ As this is being compiled before the end of the year there's still some selling to be done. However, the MCIA's official figures for the year to date (Jan-Oct) are a solid indication of which new bike will top the chart.

In 2023, the BMW R1250GS Adventure continued the GS's ongoing reign as the UK's best-selling new bike (over 125cc – Honda and Yamaha shift way more scooters and tiddlers). There were 1697 sales. In 2024, even with two months of sales to be added

BMW had shifted 1606 GSAs... but Triumph had beat them, having flogged even more examples of the new Speed 400 with 1625 bikes. You can read what makes it so popular on page 52. And, just to cement Triumph's league-topping position, the Scrambler 400 X variant has been all-but-matching the Speed's sales success. Small bikes genuinely are where it's at.



Josie's: is this the largest ever game of 'pull my finger'?

Textile jacket: Oxford Mondial Advanced

■ 'This jacket was always a revelation for Oxford as it had a laminated waterproof membrane and cost about half as much as an equivalent Gore-Tex jacket,' reckons Keith Roissetter of Sportsbikeshop in Harlow. 'It's been replaced by the Mondial 2, but we've had good stock of the original throughout 2024 and at £200 it's a steal. The membrane is bonded directly to the back of the jacket's outer shell, so it doesn't saturate like jackets with a separate waterproof liner. That's why the Mondial is such good value and why it's been the most popular jacket this year.'

Biker Café: Jolly's Bike Stop, Devon

■ This one's less of a 'best attended', more a popularity contest. A recent poll by the UK Biker Café Facebook group attracted more than 3500 votes for the 'Top UK Biker Cafés of 2024' and this year Josie's Bike Stop at The Jolly Roger in Bovey Tracey, Newton Abbot, Devon, came out tops. Praised for its regular Thursday bike nights and friendly atmosphere, it's a popular stop for ride-outs and groups. Second was The Old Stores Motorbike Café in Mold, North Wales. Third went to the Owls Nest, Llandovery, while the *Bike* office lunchtime regular – Two Flags at Morcott, Rutland – came fourth.



Used bike: Honda GL1800 Gold Wing (!)

► How do you find the most popular used bike in Britain? You sneak into the MCN offices while they're enjoying an extended 'working' lunch and delve into the data from their online Bikes for Sale to find the most-searched-for models.

The top ten for the past 12 months is either a) an eye-opening revelation and proof of the cruiser's huge resurgence, or b) evidence that a lot of people who search for used bikes online are perhaps not actual buyers but rather non-riders typing in famous model names that they've heard. We're going with the latter, given that there are two Harley-Davidsons in the top five. Still interesting reading, mind.

- 1 Honda GL1800 Gold Wing
- 2 Harley-Davidson Fat Boy
- 3 Honda NC750X
- 4 Yamaha R1
- 5 Harley-Davidson Breakout
- 6 Honda VFR800
- 7 Kawasaki Z900RS
- 8 BMW S1000RR
- 9 Honda CBR1000RR Fireblade
- 10 Triumph Bonneville T100

Show/festival: Motorcycle Live

► Biggest bike bash of the year? Motorcycle Live. This year's show at the NEC attracted 'just under 90,000' visitors, with 11 colleges and universities attending 'career days' to encourage new riders and jobs within the industry. Good stuff. It remains easily the UK's best-attended show. In comparison, 'over 30,000' attended the two-day Devitt MCN London Motorcycle Show in February, with around the same going to the Classic Motorcycle Mechanics Show in Stafford in October. The ABR Festival at Ragley Hall, Warks, in June, was capped at 17,500.

The most-searched-for used bike. Nobody saw that one coming...



Dealer: West Coast Motorcycles, Glasgow

► Potentially contentious as we're not after the biggest or the most commercially successful, but the somewhat subjective 'best loved'. So we challenged an expert: MCN dealer team sales manager Phil Martin.

'There are no league tables – different dealers work with different manufacturers, there's new and used... But the most recent dealer to win MCN's Dealer of the Year award is West Coast Motorcycles.

'Having had significant success with Harley-Davidson, they opened up with Triumph in the last year or so and that seems to be going really well. They do a lot in their community, put on regular bike nights, and they've got great customer feedback.'

Helmet: Scorpion Exo-1400 Evo Carbon Air

► Sportsbikeshop is the 'biggest online motorcycle clothing and accessories retailer in the UK', which means they know lots about kit and clobber. The clothing and accessories retailer has nine stores nationwide, stocks all the leading brands, claims to get more website visitors than any other online UK motorcycle store, and therefore knows better than any what sells.

'This is Sportsbikeshop's top-selling helmet for the first 10 months of 2024,' Keith Roissetter, manager of the Harlow branch, tells us. 'It's thanks to a mix of light weight, practical features and cool looks. The carbon-fibre shell is light and looks great – and there's a tinted visor included as well as the standard clear one, which definitely adds to the appeal. The Airfit system helps, too, as inflatable pockets behind the cheek pads mean we can tune the fit to suit a lot of riders without having to replace the pads. The price has been another big factor: there's a new model out, so this one is less than £250. Thankfully we've still got a good supply in the core sizes.'



World championship race: British MotoGP, Silverstone

■ If you watched this year's British GP on TV and thought it looked a bit quiet in the stands, it's perhaps because you were watching on telly instead of being there to witness Jake Dixon's Moto2 win. Silverstone was better attended than in 2023 – total for the weekend was 117,867, which was a slight increase. Shame the number for Sunday's race day was slightly down, from 48,564 to 42,529.

In comparison, weekend attendance at the Donington Park World Superbike round was 52,743. Which is clear proof that we require another Foggy. Back in the late 1990s, at the height of 'Foggy Mania', WSB comfortably whopped GP's ass when it came to spectators – in 1999 when Carl Fogarty was chasing his fourth title, the Brands WSB round was witnessed by a staggering 121,000 fans. It was the biggest single-day attendance at any British sporting event that year.

'Thought it looked quiet? That's because you were watching on telly instead of being there to witness Jake's emotional win'

Jake talks to Mat Oxley next month. You can expect more 'eyewear'



The Oxley interview

Mat is a TT winner, endurance racer, author and MotoGP paddock insider

MotoGP's survivor

Only three riders will get to race a 2025-spec Ducati Desmosedici next season: Marc Marquez, Pecco Bagnaia and **Fabio Di Giannantonio**. The Italian youngster tells us why his ride to the top has been such a roller coaster

By Mat Oxley Photography Dorna, Ducati, Gresini, Red Bull, VR46

If you were racing motorcycles in the 1960s and wanted to taste Grand Prix glory, you had to ingratiate yourself with the cantankerous Count Domenico Agusta and have him bless you with one of his red and silver MV Agustas. If you were chasing biking's biggest gong in the 1990s, you had to impress HRC warlord Yoichi Oguma into arming you with a Honda NSR500.

If you want to win next year's MotoGP crown there's only one man who can help you do it: Ducati Corse wizard Gigi Dall'Igna, who may furnish you with the only weapon up to the job – a Ducati Desmosedici GP25.

Of the many thousands of hungry young racers on this planet, only three will get to race these 300-horsepower, 225mph missiles in 2025: six-times MotoGP king Marc Marquez, two-time world champion Pecco Bagnaia, and a thrusting young Roman called Fabio Di Giannantonio. It marks a striking turnaround for a rider who has spent much of the past few years desperately trying to pull his career out of terminal dive.

Di Giannantonio has always been a bit under the radar. You see some riders on their way to MotoGP ages before they get there – the reputations of riders like Valentino Rossi and Marc Marquez preceded them, so you knew they were coming. Not Di Giannantonio, who, by the way, is a very easy-going interviewee and speaks excellent English. We only get lost in translation once, when we are talking about his earliest days, when his hotelier mum and dad bought him his first motorcycle.

'My first bike was for my sixth birthday – a red minimoto with dee no sores stickers,' he says.

Sorry, with what?

'Dee no sores.'

Oh, you mean dinosaurs!



Qatar, 2023. 'Diggia' wins to save his MotoGP career. Next year he'll ride one of only three factory Ducatis

'It's a striking turnaround for a rider who has spent much of the past few years desperately trying to pull his career out of terminal dive'



The Oxley interview



The 26-year-old Italian's journey to the top has been less spectacular than Marquez's and Rossi's and fraught with obstacles: two race wins in three years of Moto3, one victory in three seasons of Moto2 and only 20th overall in his 2022 rookie MotoGP campaign with Gresini Ducati. And so Di Giannantonio wasn't far away from losing his ride at the end of 2022 and he was certain he was finished in 2023 when Marquez quit Honda and was aiming for Di Giannantonio's Desmosedici ride.

'2022 was a disaster, a complete disaster, for many reasons,' says Di Giannantonio. 'I was a rookie and also my staff in the garage were MotoGP rookies – my crew chief, my data analyst – so it was super-complicated. It was like we were trying to understand things from each other but we were all rookies. When it's like this and you are competing against teams like VR46 and the factory Ducati team, it's impossible!'

'In MotoGP you need the complete package. You, the bike and the team staff must be as one. Everyone has to do their thing: the rider must be competitive, the bike has to be good and the crew chief, data analyst and engineers must be experienced, with lots of knowledge. If you don't have all these pieces together you will finish last, because MotoGP is so tough now.'

'If you do have all of this you can be good, but to be the best you need to be in another league, you need to be perfect in everything.'

Di Giannantonio's first MotoGP contract was a one-plus-one, which means you may get signed for a second season if you've done enough to deserve it in your first. And one top-ten finish in 2022 wasn't really enough.

'But the team boss understood what had gone wrong,' says Di Giannantonio. 'So Gresini gave me the opportunity to make another contract with a crew chief with a lot of experience, so I restarted with Frankie Carchedi.'

Briton Carchedi had guided Joan Mir to the 2020 MotoGP title and was out of a job when Suzuki quit the championship at the end of 2022. Di Giannantonio's reaction to the news that he would be working with Carchedi gives some idea of the emotional commitment racers give to their jobs.

'When I heard that Frankie was coming I started to cry in my motorhome. I cried for, like, one hour because I was super-happy, because I saw the light at the end of the tunnel. So, 2023 was my real rookie season and it started with good results. I was in the top ten quite consistently, I was there and making progress.'

Di Giannantonio was getting faster and faster, demonstrating that he deserved his place on the grid. And then the rumours started...

'I was doing good things, honestly, then all the speculation started and life started to be tough again. From early July, Gresini told me

All smiles in 2018 as Diggia finished runner-up in Moto3 to his teammate. Some chap called Jorge Martin...

Diggia leading the Moto3 pack in 2018. Gresini's sponsor Del Conca make posh tiles, y'know...



that it was going to be really complicated to stay with them for 2024. Then we heard rumours and finally in late July we understood that Marc was coming to the team for 2024.'

Marquez had been with the factory Honda team for 11 seasons but wanted out because the factory's RC213V project was in disarray. The six-times MotoGP king knew that if he wanted to win again he needed a Ducati Desmosedici. And the only available Ducati seat was Di Giannantonio's. All's fair in love and war.

'Mentally it was so tough because it was a roller coaster – not a high-level roller coaster but a low-level roller coaster,' he laughs, because his MotoGP career hadn't yet reached a high altitude; it was more like he was bunny-hopping across the MotoGP landscape, desperately trying to avoid a crash-landing and the end of his premier-class career.

'I became super-focused and had huge help from my staff – my mental coach, my trainer, my manager, my assistant. We said, "Okay, let's focus and enjoy". Don't put extra pressure on myself because there's already lots of pressure, so just enjoy it and really focus on my riding, getting better, day by day. That was the key to improving in every session and in every race. Then we would see what happens at the end of the season.'

The final third of Di Giannantonio's 2023 season was a masterclass in focusing on your goal and blocking out the noise that's all around. Six Grands Prix to go and he scored his first top-five. The following week at Phillip Island he climbed a MotoGP podium for the first time and a month after that he took second in the Qatar GP sprint, a few



**'To be the best
you need to be
in another
league – perfect
in everything'**



**Moto2, Jerez,
2021. Digia (right)
masters the art of
prosecco spraying
after victory over
Marco Bezzecchi**

tenths behind title challenger Jorge Martin. Di Giannantonio had arrived... but he was still out of a job.

'On the Saturday night in Qatar, after my podium in the sprint, I was 100 per cent sure I would be at home in 2024, I was done.'

Then another plot twist.

The following day Di Giannantonio and his Desmosedici GP22 won the Qatar Grand Prix, defeating world champion Bagnaia's GP23. But he was still out of a job.

'When I won the race I knew I was going to be staying home the next year but at least I'd won a race. Then on the Tuesday I got a message from Valentino [Rossi] and my manager got a message from Uccio [Salucci, VR46 team boss]. Valentino said "hey, we need to speak", and then the hope became a bit more, day by day.'

Rossi's VR46 Ducati team had lost Luca Marini to the factory Honda squad, where he would replace Marquez, so there was a 2024 Ducati seat going after all. One moment he was plummeting to the ground again, the next he was out of the dive and heading for the heavens.

But hold on, calm down – a deal had yet to be done – so Di Giannantonio arrived at the Valencia finale still unsure of his fate.

The final race of the season is always followed by the first test of the winter. MotoGP riders who are changing teams usually get special leathers made for the tests, because they can't wear their old leathers on their new bikes and contractual obligations (most contracts run to 31 December) prohibit them from running their new colours, so they come up with a nice design that reflects their future.

Fabio Di Giannantonio CV

Born: 10th October 1998 **Lives:** Rome

- » 2014 8th Red Bull Rookies Cup
- » 2015 2nd Red Bull Rookies Cup
- » 2016 6th Moto3 world championship
- » 2017 5th Moto3 world championship
- » 2018 2nd Moto3 world championship
- » 2019 9th Moto2 world championship
- » 2020 15th Moto2 world championship
- » 2021 7th Moto2 world championship
- » 2022 20th MotoGP world championship
- » 2023 12th MotoGP world championship
- » 2024 10th MotoGP world championship

Di Giannantonio still had no future, so he turned up at Valencia with a plain black set of leathers, still unsure if he'd be riding at the test.

'I asked my guys to make a test suit with no logos or nothing, so I could either use it at the test or keep it at home for the rest of my life.'

Finally, on Saturday evening, on the eve of the final race... 'In the VR46 office I signed the contract. It was, like, wow! Unbelievable!'

Once again, Di Giannantonio had pulled out of the dive at the last moment. But how did he keep his head through this turmoil?

'One good point I have is that I can switch my brain. The world can be destroyed outside, but when I put on my helmet I can switch. It is tough to do, really tough, and I struggle to do it, but I do it. Usually.'

Unfortunately, Di Giannantonio's 2024 season didn't start as well as his 2023 campaign had ended, because his VR46 GP23 didn't work so well with Michelin's 2024 rear slick tyre. This was a problem, because Di Giannantonio needed top results to deserve a latest-spec Desmosedici for 2025. Once again, he was losing altitude, heading for the ground.

Rider	Time	Gap	Pos
1	1:40.123		1
2	1:40.456	+0.333	2
3	1:40.789	+0.666	3
4	1:41.012	+0.889	4
5	1:41.345	+1.222	5
6	1:41.678	+1.555	6
7	1:42.001	+1.888	7
8	1:42.334	+2.221	8
9	1:42.667	+2.554	9
10	1:43.000	+2.887	10

Getting words of advice from team boss Rossi at Jerez in 2024. He'd be foolish not to



‘As a factory rider you can choose your own direction with the bike... I hope to be in the same position that Martin has been in’



Assen, 2024. P4 – and a thumbs-up in response from Ducati chiefs who turned up at the next race with a factory contract

It's a hard life being a MotoGP rider. But such boating trips may be few and far between from now on

‘The goal for 2025 and for the next years was to ride a factory bike,’ he says, ‘because for my growth I need a factory bike to try to improve my skills and my results.’

He came good just in time, finishing an excellent fourth at Assen behind the GP24s of Bagnaia, Martin and Enea Bastianini. And he had some luck when Martin and Marco Bezzecchi announced they were leaving Ducati for Aprilia, so Ducati chief executive Claudio Domenicali brought a factory contract to the next race and Di Giannantonio signed on the dotted line: he would remain at VR46 for 2025, with a GP25 and factory staff dedicated entirely to his needs.

‘I can’t wait to be part of the Ducati development project, because as a factory rider you can choose your own direction with the bike, so I expect to be in a strong position. I hope to be in the same position that Martin has been in.’

If next year is anything like this year – and it probably will be – Ducati’s Desmosedici GP25 will be just about unbeatable in MotoGP.

Finally Di Giannantonio can see all the way to very top. Only two problems – Marquez and Bagnaia, MotoGP’s strongest riders of the past decade, will also ride GP25s.

Over the past three years Di Giannantonio has spent many hundreds of hours examining their data – all Ducati riders have full access to each other’s data, to help them improve. So, what has he learned from his fellow Desmosedici riders?

‘I look mostly at Pecco’s and Marc’s data. I’m a good braker, but it’s Pecco’s manoeuvre during braking that makes him perfect – how he prepares the entry and therefore the exit of the corner. So I study him; and I study Marc. When Marc is in Marc mode, like at Aragon [where Marquez won his first races since 2021] he can squeeze the front tyre more and trust it more, especially in left-handers, so I need to learn that from him.’

Most of all, Di Giannantonio will keep working, because although natural talent is a wonderful weapon, it’s not everything – and it’s useless without hard work, laser-focused dedication (basically erasing everything from your life except racing) and the capacity to smash yourself up every now and again and continue trudging towards the summit, no matter how much it hurts.

‘I’m a good worker and this helps me perform,’ he says. ‘I’ve always trained hard – a lot of motocross, especially in the winter – and then as I grew as a rider I picked up my level of training even more. Now I understand that I arrived at a level that wasn’t good for my mental health, so now when I train I try to enjoy it and try not to think about racing or the next race – let it go, don’t stress.’

You may not have heard much about Di Giannantonio until now – but you’ll likely be hearing a lot more about him in 2025. **END**

NEXT ISSUE | Mat natters to **Jake Dixon** about Moto2 and how to get more Brits into GPs

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Group test

Small yet mighty:
Speed 400 v Enfield
Guerrilla (top right)
v Zontes Sports
Café (bottom right)





A rider wearing a blue jacket and a helmet with a Union Jack design is riding a black and orange Royal Enfield Guerrilla motorcycle. The bike is shown in motion on a grassy field, with a blurred background suggesting speed.

This is where it's at

Biking in Britain is changing. Triumph's best-selling Speed 400, Royal Enfield's new Guerrilla and the bargain Zontes Sports Café battle to be the best game-changing ride

By Jim Moore Photography Adam Shorrock



Triumph Speed 400

It's just like a proper big Bonneville that's been put on the wrong wash

Leicester, rush hour. The city centre streets buzz with commuters desperate to get home. Beeping horns, overly loud car stereos, and the din of big diesel engines provide the soundtrack to this semi-controlled chaos. But amid the hustle and bustle I'm having a blast, because I'm on the Triumph Speed 400.

The little Triumph's deft agility is my weapon against this sea of slow-moving traffic. Darting in and out of gaps between cars, vans and buses becomes the game – a challenge this small yet perfectly formed 400 executes with aplomb. Every set of lights offers another chance to charge off the line, snick through the butter-smooth gearbox, dive on the brakes and weave through the next inevitable queue to do it all again. Making light work of city traffic really matters for this entry-level Triumph. Its target market – new riders, urban types and commuters – prize light weight, punchy acceleration and whippet manoeuvrability above pretty much everything else.

The Speed 400 delivers all this and more. Much more. Which is why in 2024 it's been the UK's best-selling bike (excluding 125s and scooters). Experienced riders are lapping it up as a second bike, or even trading down from their large Triumph model. The Scrambler 400 X variant is nigh-on as popular, too. Helped along by all of Royal Enfield's modest-size machines, the 400 is changing the face of British biking.

'The thing about the Triumph,' muses fellow tester Jon Urry when we eventually reach a café free from Leicester's reach, 'is that while it's relatively inexpensive to buy, it doesn't feel cheap. There's a refinement to the ride, suspension, brakes, and overall finish that lifts it way above the other two.'

Out on A and B-roads the Speed 400 continues to charm. Swift steering, light controls, precise handling, ample grip (Pirelli Diablo Rosso rubber), and enough oomph to pass other vehicles with ease gives it a presence way above its 'entry' status. The only annoyances exposed by open-road running are a slightly buzzy, unsettled feel when cruising at 70mph. That's 6000rpm – 2000rpm short of peak power (40bhp) and a further 4000rpm below the redline. Mirrors, tacked on the end of the 'bars, are small and vibrate too much to be of real use, too. The Guerrilla's bigger lenses are far superior.

'You're forever throwing gears at the Triumph,' says third test rider and *Bike* spannerer Bruce Dunn after trying it on both back lanes and trunk roads. 'Whereas the similar-performing Enfield feels more relaxed, less frantic.' Longer gearing would help calm the Speed 400's nerves, but that would knock the edge off the engine's low-down zest – so it's perhaps not a trade worth making.

Bruce again: 'For me, the Triumph combines the best bits of both the Royal Enfield and Zontes. Like the Guerrilla it's comfortable enough to cover reasonable distance on, but with a two-litre-bigger tank it has a greater range. Performance wise, it's also a good match for the Enfield.

'While only a 400 single, the Speed is far from a bargain basement build'



Above: You get a lot for your £5195. Wonky ankle optional



Left: developed with Bajaj, but feels every bit like a Triumph



Below: big analogue speedo, separate digital info – classy

'It hustles well too, like the Zontes – maybe not quite as sporty in feel, but as a package it really works. Feels properly built as well.'

While the Speed 400 is the most expensive of the three at £5195, Triumph have spent money in the right places: the front ByBre caliper (as in 'By Brembo') is a four-potter; the upside-down Showa

Big Piston forks are a decent match for the bike's 170kg kerb weight and capability; the clocks are tastefully finished; while LED lights, switchable traction control, and classically inspired two-tone paint show the Speed is far from a bargain basement build.

Bigger riders may prefer the Guerrilla's slightly roomier ergonomics to the Speed 400's compact seating arrangement – the Triumph is a cute, dinky thing. But very

little else draws criticism. The dual-purpose Scrambler 400 X is £600 more, yet other than a set of semi-knobby tyres, handguards and a bash plate it's hard to see what the extra cash delivers over the Speed.

If you're in the market for a first bike, a second bike to complement your main ride, a fun commuter, or just something light, agile, fun and affordable to scurry about on, the Speed 400 is a fine place to start. In fact, I might just head back to Leicester to compete in the rush hour GP all over again. It's that good.



Pay for your Speed 400

Examples

» **CASH PRICE:**
£5195 on the road

» **PCP:**
Deposit £1039, 36 monthly payments £71.81,
optional final payment £2560 (4000 miles,
9.9% APR, total £6184.16)

» **HP:**
Deposit £1039, 37 months
£129.74, total £5849.38
(9.9% APR)



Royal Enfield Guerrilla 450

The Indian giants are kings of accessible, high-fun, small-capacity bikes. Means the new 'un has a lot to live up to

There's a bullish swagger to the Guerrilla. Or at least to how Royal Enfield see their new model's impact on the naked roadster class. The Indian marque's account of this 450 single reads like a lesson in barely concealed contempt for the competition.

'Modern roadsters look generic, sound synthetic and feel plastic,' asserts the barbed marketing guff, before stepping in for the killer blow. 'The Guerrilla 450 is a declaration of independence from this mind-numbing conformity. In an age where automation has dulled sensation, algorithms have stifled imaginations, and feature sets have replaced soul – the Guerrilla stands defiantly apart.'

Fighting talk aside, we should be in little doubt that the Guerrilla is a stripped-back, no-nonsense roadster. Less is more, if you will. But watching Bruce – a fella usually able to sum up a bike within seconds – staring at the new 450, face contorted in confusion, it seems as if Royal Enfield's message has been lost in translation somewhere between intention and production.

'I don't get it,' he says, rubbing his chin. 'It looks cheap and ugly, like it's been designed by a primary school kid. With that weird hybrid look I'm not exactly sure what it is. Roadster? Scrambler? Urban pose? What's it for? I dunno...'

Fellow tester Jon is equally scathing: 'It feels like Enfield have gone backwards in a market that's moving in the opposite direction; basic forks with gaiters, plus a two-pot front caliper on a bike that's barely cheaper than the Triumph? It doesn't make sense.'

Pay for your Guerrilla 450

Examples

» CASH PRICE:

£5050 (as tested)

» PCP:

Deposit £1010, 36 monthly payments £79.90, optional final payment £1938 (4000 miles, 9.9% APR, total £5744.50)

» HP:

Deposit £1010, 36 months £124.49, total £5501.64 (9.9% APR)



Above: is that the whiff of a Ducati Scrambler...?

Left: analogue-style speedo meets the digital age

Right: this stuff is good for luring the young 'uns



The paint doesn't help. None of us are convinced by the trippy '70s style black/purple/yellow combo. Fortunately less challenging colours are available – some knocking £200 off the overall price. And beyond the Guerrilla's visual impact lies a package based around the excellent Himalayan 450, so all is not lost.

We rate the Himalayan; it's punchy, fun, a doddle to squeeze the best out of, and a huge improvement on the previous 410 model. The Guerrilla shares the same 452cc four-valve motor so it's quick off the mark, romping through its beautifully light gearbox with a vigour that keeps the Triumph on its toes and reduces the Zontes to a dot in the mirrors.

'Can't fault the engine,' smiles Bruce after finally swinging a leg over the Guerrilla.

'The fuelling's crisp, and for a 450 it's quite fruity. The gear lever can be a pain though. Sometimes your boot catches the Z-shaped lever rather than the shift pad. Even in heavy boots you can feel it.'

The Guerrilla delivers similar numbers to the Triumph – just shy of 40bhp and 30 lb.ft. Zontes say their ZT350-GK is within a whisker of the Royal Enfield too, but in the real world the Guerrilla 450 is the best performer of the trio. Just...

Switch the spotlight to handling, however, and the Royal Enfield has to re-establish itself in the pecking order. From first to third.

'It can be fun and engaging to ride, but it can also be a handful'

The main culprit seems to be the Ceat Gripp XL tyres, which offer little to warrant that name.

'Better rubber would transform the Guerrilla,' reckons Bruce. 'Both feedback and grip are poor, especially when you're pushing on. On a twisty road both the Zontes and Triumph have the upper hand.'

Stability is also an issue. Following the Zontes and Triumph along a gnarly B-road has the Guerrilla struggling to maintain composure as bumps and decaying tarmac put the basic Showa forks and shock to the test.

Braking isn't a match for the Speed 400 either. Both bikes run a single front disc – 310mm on the Guerrilla and 300mm on the Triumph – as well as a ByBre caliper, but the Enfield's two-potter lacks the bite of the Speed's four-piston unit.

Overall, Royal Enfield's claim that the Guerrilla 450 is far from sterile or generic rings true. To a point. It can be fun and engaging, but it can also be a handful compared to its more composed competition. Up against the Speed 400, the Guerrilla lacks sparkle, kerb appeal, and cohesion as a complete package. Enfield's other small-capacity bikes have been runaway successes, but this new one doesn't quite hit the spot.

'I had high expectations for the Guerrilla,' says Jon in summary. 'But riding it back to back against the Speed 400, Royal Enfield seem to have missed the mark. And that's a shame.'



Pay for your ZT350-GK

Examples

» **CASH PRICE:**
£3699 on the road

» **PCP:**
Deposit £740, 36 monthly payments £59.72,
optional final payment £1540 (4000 miles,
10.9% APR, total £4429.92)

» **HP:**
Deposit £740, 36 months
£95.78, total £4198.08
(10.9% APR)

Zontes ZT350-GK Sports Café

Looks? Tech? Cool name? All of that.
And it's staggeringly cheap, too

From its unashamedly MV Brutale-influenced lines and light, responsive handling to its plethora of electronic gizmos and almost over-the-top MotoGP-esque front disc shroud, the Zontes ZT350-GK Sports Café impresses. It's proof that a sporty, impactful single is a genuine alternative to the many retros swamping the lightweight roadster class.

Better still, the 350-GK represents astonishing value for money. Originally priced at £4699 on the road, Zontes have slashed the price by a grand to just £3699, for the time being at least. That's almost fifteen hundred quid less than Triumph's Speed 400 and £1350 cheaper than Royal Enfield's new Guerrilla 450. Temptation on that scale warrants serious inspection.

Having snuck the key away from my colleagues, so I can have it to myself for the evening, I'm straight into an exploratory scan around the electronics. For a bike costing just over three-and-a-half grand new, there's a lot of tech to unpack, from the keyless ignition and electronic steering lock – released by a switch on the left switchgear cluster – to a button-activated fuel filler flap and seat release. Neither the Triumph nor Enfield come with any of that.

There are riding modes too – Sport and Eco. And for the 35-mile blast home we'll stick with the former. After all, the GK's aggressive lines, low 'bars, rearset 'pegs and all the deliberately racy-looking componentry don't exactly encourage a short-shifting meander...

The ride is firmer and stiffer than both the Triumph and Royal Enfield – significantly in the latter's case – yet still comfortable. My commute takes in the horrendously surfaced A47 between Peterborough and Guyhirn, a 13-mile tooth-rattling patchwork of potholes and poorly repaired craters that's a workout for any bike's suspension. The Zontes is happy to zap along in sixth, overtaking slower traffic where necessary, without dislodging any fillings or jolting my spine in the process.

As a package the GK is without question the sportiest of our trio, proving the perfect partner for play when we finally arrive at an uncharacteristically curvy Fenland back road. The urge to shift back an inch or two in the seat and duck down behind the TFT dash is irresistible.

'I'm impressed by the Zontes' handling,' offered Bruce after trying the 350 for himself. 'It steers well, the brakes are decent, and it feels like a proper little sportsbike on the right road. Even the ride quality is surprisingly good, and I rate the riding position, too.'

'Like the Enfield though, it's let down by its tyres. I'd bin them straight away and go for something sportier – there are plenty of options on those 120/70 and 160/60 sizes.'

Replacing the standard-fitment rubber once the engine has been run in would still leave you quids-in against the Triumph and



Above: all the impact of Italian exotica for a fraction of the cost



Left: unfortunately the 'seat' button doesn't eject pillions



Below: not just tyre pressures, but temps too. Swish (but small)

Enfield, such is the Zontes' price advantage. There is, however, a blot in the GK's so far impressive resume: at 348cc the Zontes is giving away 50cc to the Triumph and 104cc to the Guerrilla – and in terms of grunt it really shows.

'You really have to rev the Zontes to keep up with the other two,' affirms Bruce. 'You can close the gap to the Speed 400 and Enfield through the corners, but once on a straight you're wringing its neck to maintain momentum. Fun at first, but after a while it becomes a chore. Makes me wonder how long the motor will last having to work that hard all of the time.'

Longevity might be a worry with the Zontes. For all its funky design touches and useful tech details (backlit switchgear and dual USB charging ports, to name two), there's a concern about how certain components will look in a year or two. The ABS gubbins, for example, is tucked away below the radiator, right in the path of any gunk thrown up by the front wheel. And

the numerous 'bar-mounted buttons for the fuel cap release, seat, and steering lock aren't the most robust. If we're being really fussy, a lot of the info displayed on the TFT dash is too small for older eyes and the tyre pressure sensors have already started to fault.

But then the Zontes is dirt cheap. An absolute bargain, in fact. With a two-year warranty and 20-plus UK dealers offering peace of mind should anything actually go wrong, the ZT350-GK is a proper contender in this company. If only it was a 450...

'An absolute bargain... it's a proper contender in this company'

Verdict

After 20 years of sportsbike worship, British biking got its biggest shake-up in a generation in the early 2000s. We went adventure bike crazy. Now, another 20 years on, we're on the cusp of the next shape-shifting change. Large, go-anywhere bikes stay big business – BMW don't struggle to shift GS models – but smaller, more affordable, less complicated bikes have been stamping their authority for the past few years. Topping sales figures, bikes like these are now where it's at.

Surprisingly, given their pedigree and the fact the Himalayan is so good, Royal Enfield's Guerrilla 450 doesn't quite hit the mark. Sure, there are positives. The engine's great – the best of this trio, in fact. It offers the roomiest ergonomics. It's solidly built. And it's enjoyable to ride. But up against the Triumph, the Guerrilla's spec and parts feel wanting, the stock tyres are awful, and the overall package isn't as clearly defined or executed as either the Speed 400 or ZT350-GK. Prices for the Guerrilla range between £4850 and £5050, depending on what colour you choose, so it's slightly cheaper than the Triumph. But even then it struggles to put up a convincing argument.

Zontes' ZT350-GK doesn't raise eyebrows only because of its price. It handles, stops and performs well enough to hold its own in this company. A few more cee-cee would help, obviously – a 450 version would really take the fight to the others, but even without those extra cubes it still impresses. Some features and tech are superfluous (does it need a front disc shroud, or tyre temp and pressure sensors?), but things like the 17-litre tank, phone connectivity, LED lighting, an automatic shift from Eco to Sport mode above 7000rpm, and adjustable foot controls show how serious Zontes are. Great bike.

For now, however, Triumph's brilliant Speed 400 is the pick of the bunch. It ticks every box in this fast-moving part of the market – fun, agile, light, easy to live with, robust, stylish, plus it works brilliantly in town or on open roads. There's also a luxuriance to the finish that rarely makes its way down to this capacity bracket; it feels, rides and sounds like a 'proper' Triumph rather than simply a diminutive single. Small the Speed 400 may be, but it's perfectly formed – and it's obvious why it's shaking up the market. **Bike**

'Brilliant Speed 400 ticks every box in fast-moving part of the market'



SPECIFICATIONS	TRIUMPH SPEED 400	ROYAL ENFIELD GUERRILLA 450	ZONTES ZT350-GK SPORTS CAFÉ
Contact	triumphmotorcycles.co.uk	royalenfield.com	zontes.co.uk
Price (on the road)	£5195	£4850 (£5050 as tested)	£3699
Capacity	398cc	452cc	348cc
Engine	4v DOHC single	4v DOHC single	4v DOHC single
Bore x stroke	89 x 64mm	84 x 81.5mm	84.5 x 62mm
Transmission	6-speed, chain	6-speed, chain	6-speed, chain
Power (claimed)	40bhp @ 8000rpm	39bhp @ 8000rpm	39bhp @ 9500rpm
Torque (claimed)	28 lb.ft @ 6500rpm	30 lb.ft @ 5500rpm	24 lb.ft @ 7500rpm
Top speed	100mph (estimated)	100mph (estimated)	80mph (claimed)
Frame	tubular steel	tubular steel	tubular steel
Front suspension	43mm usd forks, non-adjustable	43mm ruw forks, non-adjustable	43mm usd forks, non-adjustable
Rear suspension	monoshock, adjustable preload	monoshock, adjustable preload	monoshock, adjustable preload
Brakes (f/r)	300mm disc, four-piston caliper / 230mm disc, single-piston caliper	310mm disc, two-piston caliper / 270mm disc, single-piston caliper	320mm disc, four-piston caliper / 265mm disc, single-piston caliper
Tyres (f/r)	110/70 R17 / 150/60 R17	120/70 R17 / 160/60 R16	120/70 ZR17 / 160/60 ZR17
Rake/trail	24.6°/102mm	21.8°/91.4mm	n/a
Wheelbase	1377mm	1440mm	1390mm
Weight (claimed)	170kg (kerb)	184kg (kerb, 90% fuel)	188kg (kerb)
Seat height	790mm	780mm	795mm
Tank size	13 litres	11 litres	17 litres
Economy	80mpg	83mpg	88mpg
Electronics	ABS, traction control	ABS, riding modes	ABS, riding modes
Bike rating	9/10	7/10	8/10



The Euro

MotoGP not bonkers enough for you? How about zero to 260mph in six seconds? *Bike* goes backstage at Santa Pod Raceway for the biggest event on the drag racing calendar

Words and photography Greg Moss

» Blink and you'll miss 'em

Alex Hope and Bertrand Maurice fire off the line on their Pro Stock bikes at this year's event. How does 190mph in seven seconds grab you? The series has loads of bike classes, including Super Street, Super Twin and – hairiest of them all – Top Fuel. There's even a Junior Drag Bike Cup for the next generation, too.



Finals

“The series has loads of bike classes... there’s even a Junior Drag Bike Cup for the next generation”



🔥 The Beast awakens

Per Bengtsson fires up his Super Twin bike, aka The Beast. 'I've won the championship four times before in the past,' he says. 'The engine is my own design completely, it's actually a very old design – I created it in 1992. It's running 90 per cent nitro and 10 per cent methanol. It's 1680cc with a supercharger, it has about 1200 horsepower. The clutch is key in drag racing, that's where you adjust the power because you cannot have 1200 horsepower on the rear tyre at the start line – you need to stagger it.'

🔥 Warning: lots of info

The dash of Alan Morrison Jnr's Super Street bike. 'Most of these have aftermarket ECUs that are programmable,' says mechanic Rick Stubbins. 'This dash is basically a tablet with a programme that comes from the ECU manufacturer. You build your own map and can virtually do anything you like.' The bike develops about 750bhp and runs on methanol. Carrillo rods, decent pistons, strong output shaft, strong clutch basket, a lot of billet parts. 'Build it from scratch it's gonna be a £50-£60,000 bike,' says Stubbins.

🔥 Speed addiction

'I'm the fastest woman in Europe,' says Dutch rider Margot Schmidt, whose turbo'd Super Street Suzuki Hayabusa runs on methanol. 'My top speed is 211mph and the time was 6.85 seconds.' Schmidt has been drag racing for 13 years and is just as enthralled now as when she started. 'If you think about it and look at the throttle it can scare you, but once you open the throttle the adrenaline rushes and you focus. Everything has to be perfect on the start line – you have to be calm. Once you cross the finish you know if it was a good or bad run – that's the kick you get out of it.'



🔥 A sticky situation

Paul Marshall, a member of the track staff at Santa Pod, explains the lengths they go to in preparing the track surface. 'We have to ensure it is spotlessly clean otherwise we cannot run a vehicle on it. We actually put glue down on the surface – a Top Fuel motorbike has 1500 to 2000 horsepower so it has to be super sticky. It's sticky enough that if you stand in one place for too long it can tear the sole of your boots off. Our crew never stand still...'





**'You don't
feed the clutch
- full throttle
and you dump
it. If it's set up
right it should
do the work
for you'**

● **Olie moly, that motor...**

The insides of Mike Olie's Top Fuel bike. 'The base engine is a turbocharged Kawasaki ZZR1400. I built everything myself', he says. 'The clutch will basically run by itself - you put a setting in it. You don't feed it - full throttle and you dump it. If it's set up right it should do the work for you. We keep it wide open and I push the button two times to shift to third gear before we're at the end. We have a scramble button - if you lose the run you can always push that and it adds another 0.25 bar of boost - 50 horsepower. People who say they don't get nervous - I don't believe them. I can't imagine that no one's heart is going to start beating harder on the start line.'



➤ Ahead: warp speed

Mark Smith nervously waits on the start line astride his Top Fuel bike. 'I have no idea [why I do it],' he says. 'As I sit waiting to go I physically feel sick and ask myself why do I do this. I have so much going through my head, but once my crewman fires it up it's "I just need to win". Then it's the procedures: burnout, roll forward, put it into first, push the button – which is my clutch lever – wring its neck, as the light goes green I let go of the button and it launches itself, then hold on for the ride. It's something to do!'

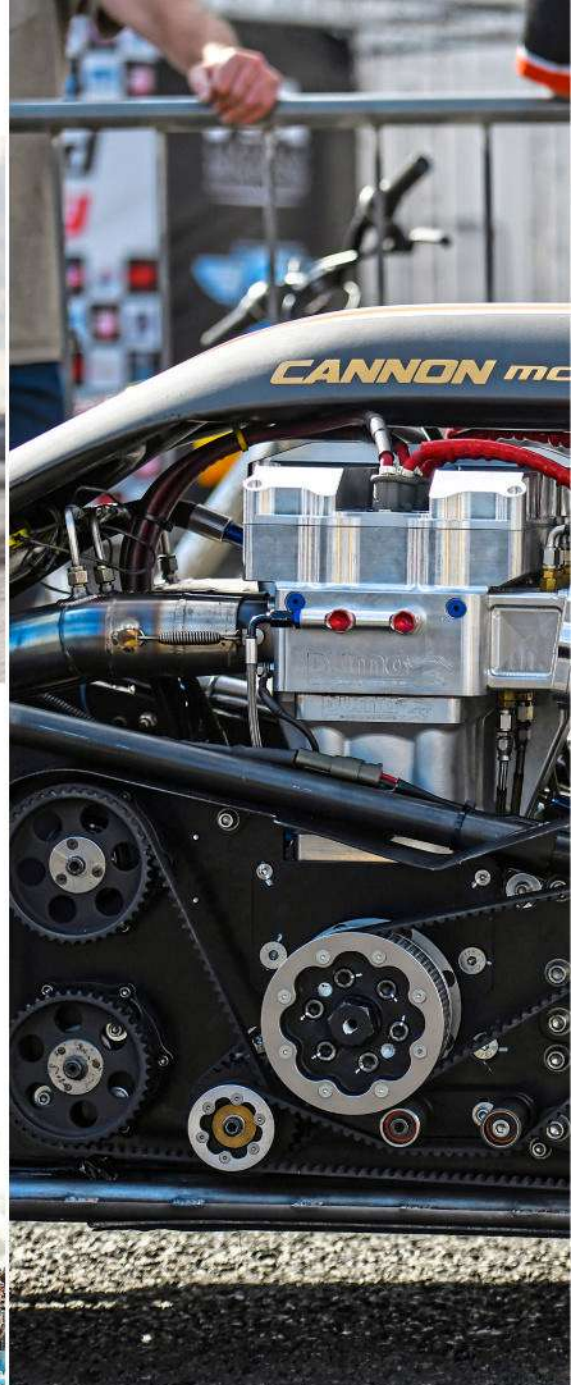
➤ Striving for perfection

Per Bengtsson prepares himself in front of a buzzing crowd, ear defenders at the ready. 'It's not scary,' he says. 'You need to have respect, of course, like all motorcycle riding you have to get used to it. Building confidence is important. You are riding the bike with feeling. It's a huge amount of work but it's the challenge. I've perhaps done 1000 runs but still haven't had the perfect run. It's not only the bike – it's the conditions, the air, the track, the rider... it's a challenge to go faster.'



➤ Thirsty machines

'It's a big fuel pump – 20 gallons a minute. So that's the reason for this big tube,' says Per Bengtsson from Sweden, one of many Scandinavians who have crossed the North Sea to race at Santa Pod. 'The engine consumes about one litre a second. We also have a big fuel pump because we want to build a very high fuel pressure. One litre a second is a lot of fuel and you need to spray it as much as possible.'



➤ Like being fired out of a cannon

'It's a Top Fuel bike, which means we run nitro methane,' explains rider Neil Midgley. 'It's a fuel that carries its own oxygen. I run 88 per cent nitro methane, 12 per cent methanol. We vary the percentage [depending] on weather conditions, track conditions...' Top Fuel is the quickest class – bikes are limited to 1700cc but they can complete the quarter mile in less than six seconds, reaching speeds of over 250mph. Midgley's bike has a 1580cc engine. 'You have to use the stud location of a standard engine,' he says. 'In theory it's a Yamaha FJ1100 engine but there's no parts in there from it. I'm using about 1700 horsepower. I came off this one at 230mph last year, this is my first time back. The chassis was ripped apart, smashed the front wheel, smashed the forks, destroyed the wheelie bars. I was knocked unconscious for a while, four fractured ribs and a fractured shoulder. I still find it scary. At the top end [of the drag strip] you're just trying to survive.'



«It's a team effort

Frenchman Eric Richard sits astride his Top Fuel Hayabusa surrounded by teammates and crew in the paddock. It has around 800bhp. 'Our best ET [elapsed time] is 6.43 seconds, top speed is 222mph,' says tuner Franck Weissenbacher, who has worked flat out to get Richard's bike ready after a serious mechanical issue. 'In the second qualification we had a lot of wheelspin for the first 100m, that's never happened before. Because we had a lot of wheelspin we reached high revs and broke the cylinder head, valves, gearbox and crankshaft. It was a new engine – and after two runs it was broken.'

Go there...

The FIA and FIM European Drag Racing Championships return to Santa Pod from 23-26 May 2025. More information and tickets at santapod.co.uk



Beyond expectation

Nothing gets close to a large sportsbike – it's an experience truly without equal. Honda's latest Fireblade has become the darling of British racing, but BMW's best-selling S1000RR is the pick for British roads... isn't it? We take a county-hopping dash on sunny tarmac in search of exceptional answers

**Are those HRC
colours, or
Union Flag...?**

By Carl Stevens Photography Adam Shorrock



Fifteen years ago, BMW did something that would have been inconceivable a few years earlier. The firm with a reputation for stout mile-swallowing motorcycles wheeled out a rip-snorting, fire-breathing, pant-straining sportsbike.

Packing benchmark horsepower and unprecedented levels of electronic wizardry, the impact made by the 2010 S1000RR was ginormous. Not on the racetrack – BMW's official entry in World Superbikes has often been there or thereabouts, but never been the preferred mount. Yes, the German factory won the 2024 title, but that was with the bells-and-whistles M1000RR and thanks in no small amount to the bewildering talents of Toprak Razgatlioglu – just look where the rest of the BMWs finished. But not being at the front in World or British Superbikes hasn't affected sales. The S1000RR has consistently been the UK's top-selling superbike – nothing else gets close. In 2023, it was also BMW Motorrad UK's second best-selling model, beaten only by the omnipresent GS. And there are multiple reasons why we all love the RR.

The sublime Bavarian bullet has become a firm favourite because often it doesn't behave like a superbike at all. Or not all the time. It's easy to think of big sportsbikes as these brutal, tortuous beasts;

machines that will snap your back and send your kneecaps into an abyss of pain after just a few minutes of riding. And that will frazzle your brain with an unforgiving engine that demands ridiculous revs and a chassis that skips and dances on anything rougher than a snooker table. The S1000RR bucked that trend, being blisteringly sporty and truly capable, yet also bringing usability, flexibility and – strewth – friendliness. This latest iteration still does.

Not only is the riding position well thought out, but there's quite a bit of space on offer, too. Its seat-to-peg-to-bar set-up isn't purely focused on brutality – it doesn't really feel how you'd expect a large sportsbike to feel at all, as it can be ridden for more than ten minutes without needing a chiropractic appointment. The suspension absorbs bumps, rather than ricocheting off them.

This usability runs deeper into the ergonomics and controls, too. 'The S1000RR feels plush,' says long-time *Bike* contributor Paul Lang, whose limbs and joints don't usually agree with clip-ons and rearsets but who is finding himself happy in the saddle. 'The dash, switchgear and functions are all fabulous. There's a lot to get used to, but once you're familiar it's all just so, so good. And it has nice heated grips too. And cruise control for bumbling through town.'

Fireblade v S1000RR

Light speed

This is all obviously wonderful. However, it's also a Very Good Job Indeed that the S1000RR has its massive TFT display reminding you what's going on – because things can very quickly get very illegal. With the bike's affability it's genuinely difficult to maintain a true sense of speed, which is a bit of a problem as the S1000RR is a time-travelling device.

It. Is. So. Fast. Yes, the model has always been monstrously quick, but the current 999cc variable-valve inline four is faster than ever. A tyre-slaying 83 pound-feet at 11,000rpm and a wild 207 brake horsepower at 13,750 revolutions is mind-boggling. Truly outrageous performance, and it makes the already scintillating BMW feel a little more exciting than ever.

However, in making it even more powerful and faster, they've also lost a little of the bike's softly-softly charm that's made it such a tantalising road bike. The throttle connection isn't as silky smooth as it used to be. The quickshifter is a pain in the backside at low speed. Curiously, even little things aren't as slick as they should be – for example, the hill start system doesn't really work with the flawless operation you'd expect. BMW have pushed the RR towards being better on the track, but it's a bit detrimental to what's made the model such a legend for the road.

This is made more apparent in the company of Honda's latest CBR1000RR-R Fireblade SP. When the Blade had its last major redesign for 2020 and sprouted even more Rs than ever, it also gained more power than ever – but this came through unprecedented revs. The bike was small, sharp, aggressive and focused, perhaps the raciest of all the replicas. But the 2024 rehash has injected the SP (there's no base model) with much-needed and very welcome loveliness. Langy shouts across how impressed he is as we dither at a junction, after just a few miles of exhilaration.

'I wasn't expecting this thing to be so bloody good,' he yawns, 'and at, well... everything. The dash is way too small and hard to read, and I can't find the fuel gauge. But in every other way it's just full of Hondaness. I think it's plusher than the BMW – everything feels nicer, like there's an extra layer of quality in the materials and finish.'

'It's the difference between a Premier Inn and a flash spa resort. Lenny Henry has done a fine job and the BMW Premier Inn does

A heavenly, refined, corker of a bike – the Fireblade oozes HRC



everything you need, but the Honda spa has all the familiarity with a bit of extra specialness.'

Admittedly both Langy and I are on the less-tall end of the spectrum – he reckons we could be smuggled onto a plane in carry-on luggage – but we both find the Blade surprisingly roomy. It doesn't feel annoyed at having to dawdle; in fact, it's rather pleasant at low speed. And it's sensational once you get it going. The Honda almost has a split personality, delivering brain-warp performance with a ferociousness that ignites that primal, adrenaline-fuelled fire in your stomach. Wind the throttle, explore the revs, and it's hard to describe the Blade's sheer thrust. It's so powerful and feels so raw, the saucy 215bhp inline-four motor devouring the rev range with an urgency that feels like it should be outlawed in our modern health and safety world. Eighty-three wallops of torque is the same shove as the BMW, and although it's delivered 1000 revs higher at a giddy 11,000rpm the Japanese bike isn't noticeably less giddy than the German.

'It's like arguing over which apple's roundest or greenest, or which strand of spaghetti is straighter,' reckons Langy. 'It's irrelevant. They both just launch you into the future.'

Brilliantly bonkers for your inner Toprak. But now less friendly in the real world





'It's like arguing over which apple is roundest or greenest... it's irrelevant. Both just launch you into the future'

Forgotten why we loved sportsbikes all them years ago? Just look at them...



M Pack adds blingy blue 'pegs. That'll be an extra five grand



A lot going on, but there's some logic



Clear and simple. BMW's dash still leads the way



Forget baguettes - you can now fit a small loaf in there

Fireblade v S1000RR

Cleverness

How the Honda engages and thrills you isn't only down to the sheer torque and power, or the fact the gearing is finally normal (previous models were ridiculously tall-g geared). It's also thanks to a clever trick up the Honda's sleeve – or rather hidden in the engine. Honda should just run a PR campaign saying the new Fireblade makes you feel like a factory MotoGP rider, as that's the sensation running through my head on the way out of each corner – and it's thanks to the magical new split throttle bodies. Race tech that's filtered to the road, it makes the bike gurgle as it runs on two cylinders, but with all the other electronic gubbins it means it's sensationally smooth on the way into a corner, too. Everything is so fabulously balanced.

This helps with the handling as well as the feel and response of the engine. The BMW's chassis is fabulous and its handling remarkable, but ridden side by side the silky Honda can brake harder, turn tighter, and offers more confidence – its front end is so responsive and impossible not to fall in love with.

'I'm more comfortable leaning over on the Blade,' agrees Langy after a knee-scutting dart across Rutland. 'The whole cornering process feels smoother, more reassuring, somehow linear.' It means for the tangled and fun roads it's the Honda's key we're fighting over – or rather the keyless fob, which is a pain in the backside. Literally – it slips out the inside of my leathers and ends up in a most inconvenient location. Who on earth thought this was a good idea on a sportsbike when modern airbag leathers don't contain proper pockets?

We reach the B676, a glorious British band of tarmac that was laid by someone who didn't know what 'straight' means. And that now has average speed cameras from an extended section. The bit of real-roads engineering that's gone into the BMW shines again: cruise control keeps pace in check and heated grips fight off the autumn chill while letting me get away with thin summer gloves. The smart variable-valve ShiftCam engine whirrs politely, the chassis pretends it's a sports tourer and masks the imperfections. But then we reach

the camera-free miles, which feel like they were crafted solely for the application of sportsbikes. With smooth tarmac, long sweeping corners, nadgery flicks and belly-floating crests, both bikes are amazing. Nothing – and we mean nothing – feels like riding a full-on superbike. But it's the Honda that once again offers that additional layer of excitement, that additional finesse. The sense of quality, and of a bike crafted by addiction.

'Riding these bikes instantly reminds me why we all used to be in love with sportsbikes,' says Langy. 'They're both astounding... but the Honda feels more special, and more surprising. It has some sort of HRC thing going on, a bit of that magic of old NSRs and VFRs and old-school Blades. It's smooth, slick, refined. And hellish fast.'

Verdict

Wondering about buying a superbike before they become extinct? Do it. Nothing feels like this, or, more to the point, makes *you* feel like this. Though more powerful and faster than ever, with all the riding aids and refinement it's like having a house-trained dragon that purrs by the fire. They're pricey: the BMW in this M Package form is £22,225 and the Blade SP is £23,499. But these obsessively crafted machines give a real sense of where every quid has gone.

This mix of fierce and friendly has always been the beauty of the BMW. It's still exceptional, but the S1000RR feels less refined than it used to; it's further down the racing rabbit hole and has lost a little of the easy-going nature that's made it a huge seller. The latest Honda may not have cruise or heated grips, but it feels more natural on the road; it puts an arm around you when necessary, instils confidence, oozes refinement. Then you unleash its ferocious performance and emit whoops almost as loud as the Blade SP's glorious soundtrack.

Big sportsbikes should have eye-widening performance and the sense of being special, with that little essential usability and some manners thrown in. With the latest Fireblade SP, we both agree that Honda have nailed that mix almost to perfection. **Bike**



Weary-eyed?
You'll need a
magnifying glass



Soprano properly
begins at 11,000rpm
– and what a tune



Comfy cheeks
for more than
ten minutes



No cruise control,
but that's not what
the Blade is about

Buy one while
you can – you
won't regret it

'Riding these bikes
reminds me why we all
used to be in love with
sportsbikes – they're
both astounding'



Blade gets its fire back



Over the 2024 racing season, Honda's Fireblade has gone from zero to hero. Tommy Bridewell very nearly won the British

Superbike title, while in Superstock a whopping 12 out of the top 15 machines in the championship were the Honda. It got TT podiums, plus won the Suzuka Eight Hour as well. We asked Honda Racing UK's team manager Javier Beltran what changed...

SUPERBIKE: 'It's down to a combination of bike and rider as Tommy has done a great job, but also the '24 model is a big step forward. For a rider there have been huge improvements that come down to driveability, feel and control. When we first got our hands on it, it was clear just how much potential was there. When I first went to a test last year in the middle of the season, I said to Honda that it was going to be a game changer. It's a different beast when we have to mould it to BSB rules, which essentially curtail the electronic aids. We had so many issues getting everything set up from the start, it's almost like building a brand-new bike with the new electronics, tank, sensors...

it goes on and on and it was a huge effort. I'd personally like to see some changes in the form of some electronic aids on the superbike. The transition from Superstock

to Superbike is huge – much bigger than even the riders perceive it to be – and the youngsters coming through don't have it easy at all,

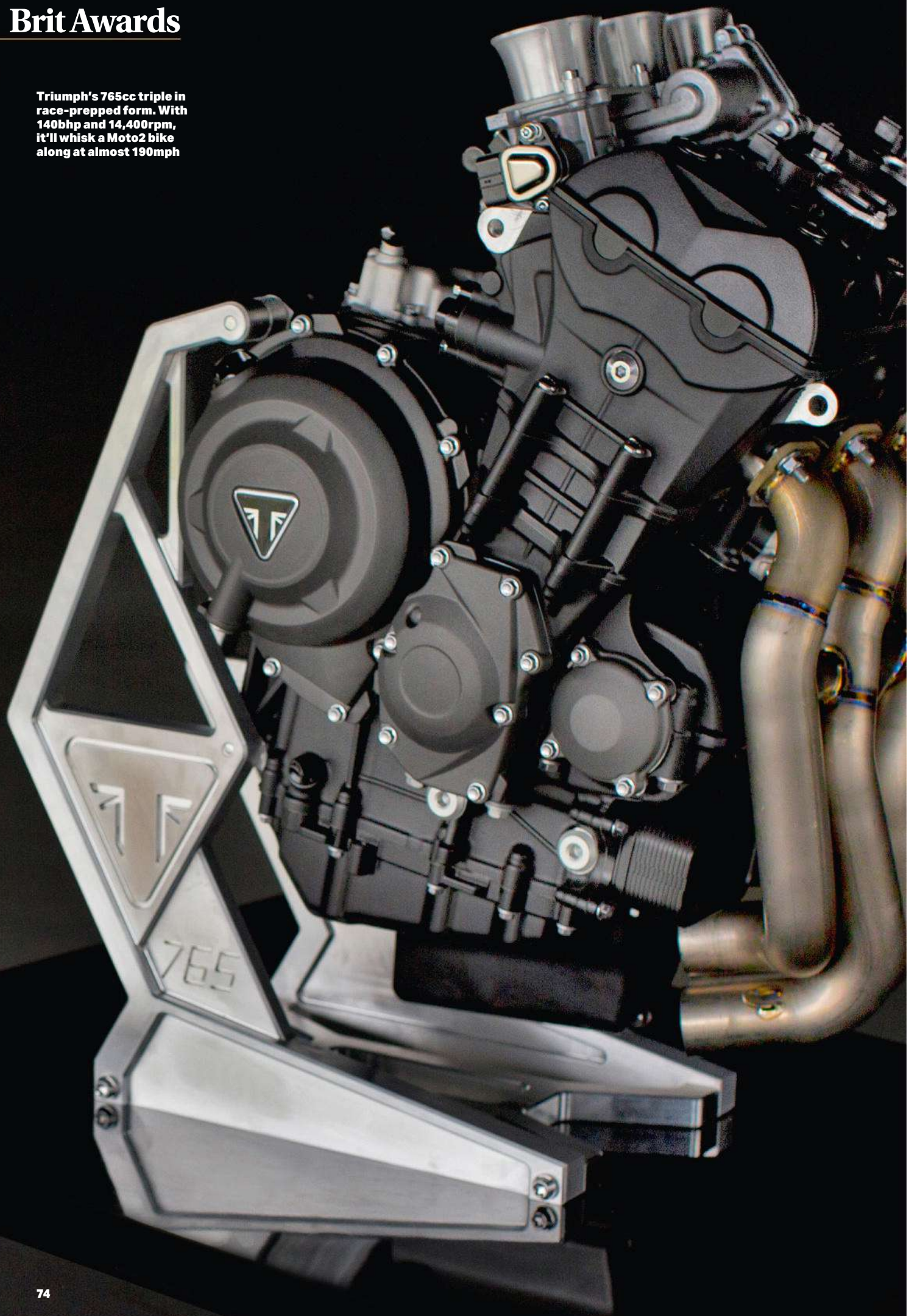
especially when they then move up to World Superbike.'

SUPERSTOCK: 'The challenge back in 2019 was having a machine at the end of its run. For a team it was hard, but I told Honda that we needed to develop the new model, gain data, win the championship – and then help other teams start off at the level where we finished. We would put the package together, sell the bikes, sell the kit and give them the data from that year too, which included everything, such as gearing and mapping. Although every rider is different, it's a great place for the younger teams to start – and a big step, as they could turn up and quickly be quite fast. We had key members from our team helping during race weekends with strategies and electronics, to understand the bike and help everyone move forward. We have a different approach to how we support teams, which goes hand in hand with an abundance of young talent coming through. What we've done in Superstock is what we now want to do in Supersport, too.'



Brit Awards

Triumph's 765cc triple in race-prepped form. With 140bhp and 14,400rpm, it'll whisk a Moto2 bike along at almost 190mph



Britain's WORLD BEATERS

The history of British bikes is littered with ifs, buts and maybes – but the industry has genuinely had the creativity to reshape motorcycling. Professor of engines **Jamie Turner** digs deep and reveals his favourite mechanical masterpieces

Words **Jamie Turner**

When I hear the phrase ‘famous British bike engine’, the first thing that pops into my mind is a parallel twin. Our famous industry was built on the things. Long-time readers of my stuff may recall I’ve never got too hot and bothered about such layouts (except two-strokes, ahem) and so I must confess a bit of a blind spot. Of course, a bit more thinking makes one realise that other layouts were enthusiastically followed, and then you remember that the good old British bike industry was from a time so long ago that mass production of engines with more than two cylinders really hadn’t yet begun – until the Japanese killed our industry with the things.

Accepting this, there are only a few ways to dispose two cylinders, and I guess logic drives you to a parallel arrangement when you have a mindset based around producing singles fitted in loop-type frames. V-twins are more expensive to make, so why bother with that if it’s going to be more difficult to install as well? And the boxer? Pah! The Brits had invented it, with the Fée and much better-known Douglas, and then discarded it – so who on earth was ever going to make a success of that?

For whatever reason – and ironically, given the current enthusiasm for the layout – one could argue that British manufacturers were well ahead of the pack with the parallel-twin engines. From the market-changing Triumph 5T Speed Twin of Edward Turner (no relation to me that I know about, sadly), to the Norton Commando, Triumph T120 Bonneville, or indeed the Ariel Square Four – another Turner creation, fabulously quirky, and essentially two parallel twins geared together.

But really dive into Britain’s engineering history and there are many other layouts. Towards the top of my historical list would be two singles: the Manx Norton, if only for its win-tastic reputation, and the two-valve

version of the AJS 7R. Move on to Vees and you have the HRD Vincent and the JAP V-twin in the iconic Brough Superior, of course. The Triumph/BSA triple from the late 1960s dominated racing, and the modern-era Triumph inline threes define the brand and have iconic status.

The list is very long and esteemed, and rest assured I do not want to offend anyone by neglecting to mention their favourite. There are really too many to mention. But here are my favourites...

Triumph 765

Most famous British engines – and most of those mentioned above – are from a time when ‘water cooling’ meant riding in the rain. But modern Triumph triples deserve praise. The 1050cc engine established the layout as their ‘signature’, and their 765cc engine as used in Moto2 – and the flexible, refined, engaging road engine that spawned it – must be well up the list of greats.

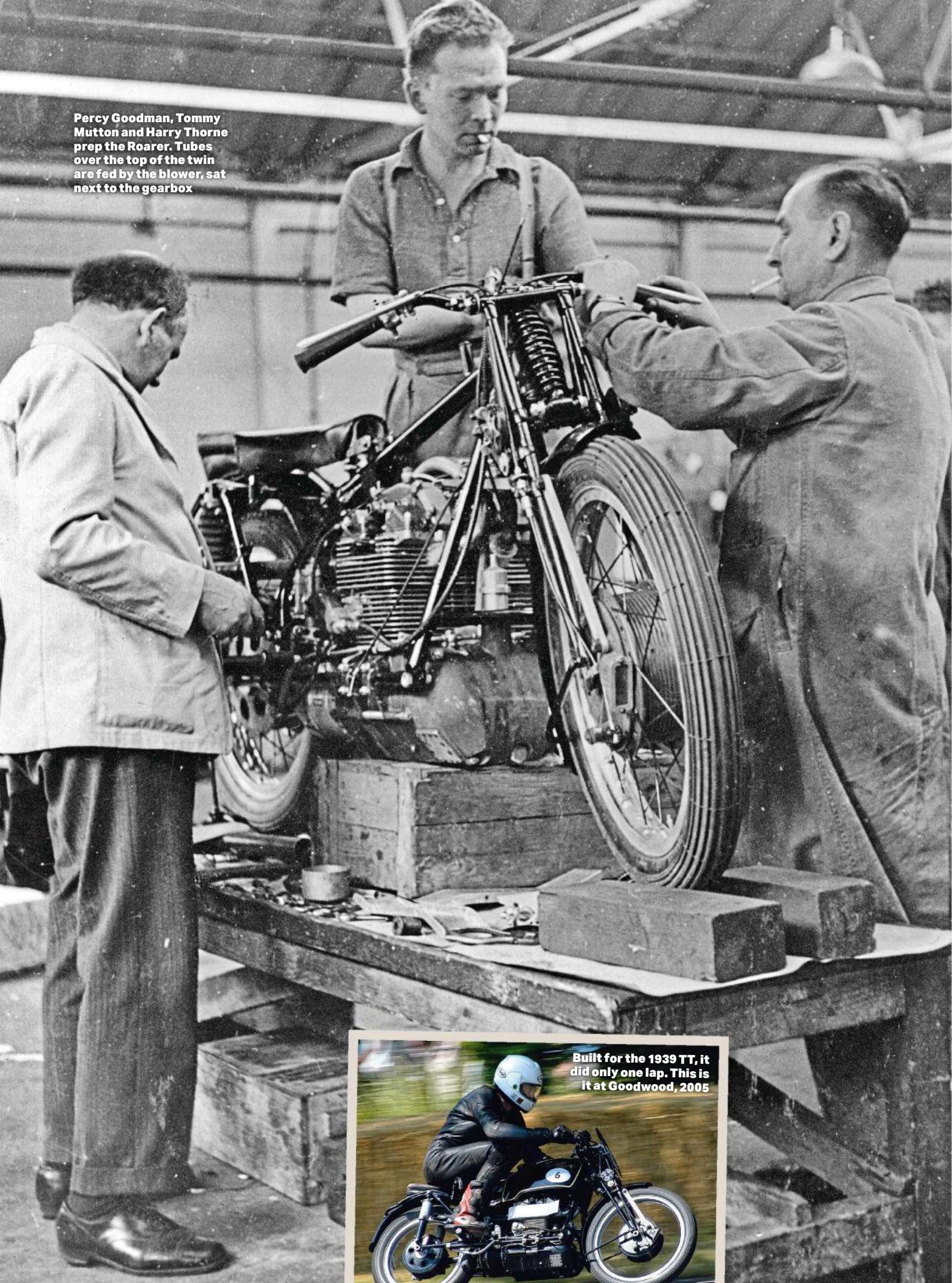
In fact, you could probably point to any modern Triumph triple; mainly because they are now the only mass-market British OEM, but also because the motors

**Street Trip: best-ever
Brit bike (p37), motor
one of many reasons**

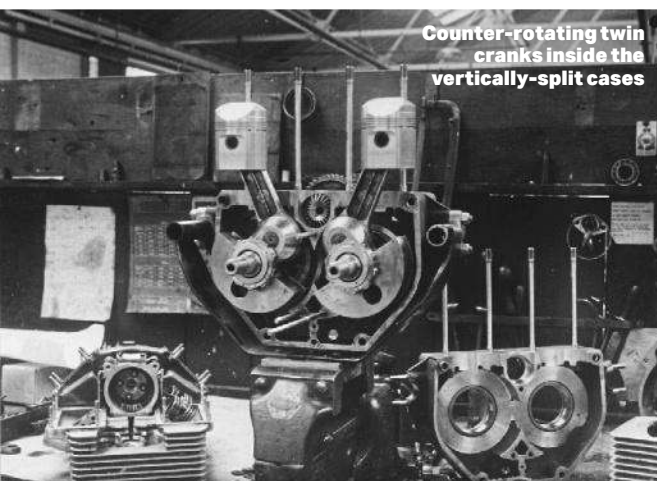


PICS: TRIUMPH

Percy Goodman, Tommy Mutton and Harry Thorne prep the Roarer. Tubes over the top of the twin are fed by the blower, sat next to the gearbox



PICS: DENNIS QUINLAN, MIKE TOZER



Counter-rotating twin cranks inside the vertically-split cases

themselves have improved massively. Recent T-plane crank units were, I've heard, a bit of a miss-step, but I'm still confident they would still be good in most respects...

Velocette Roarer

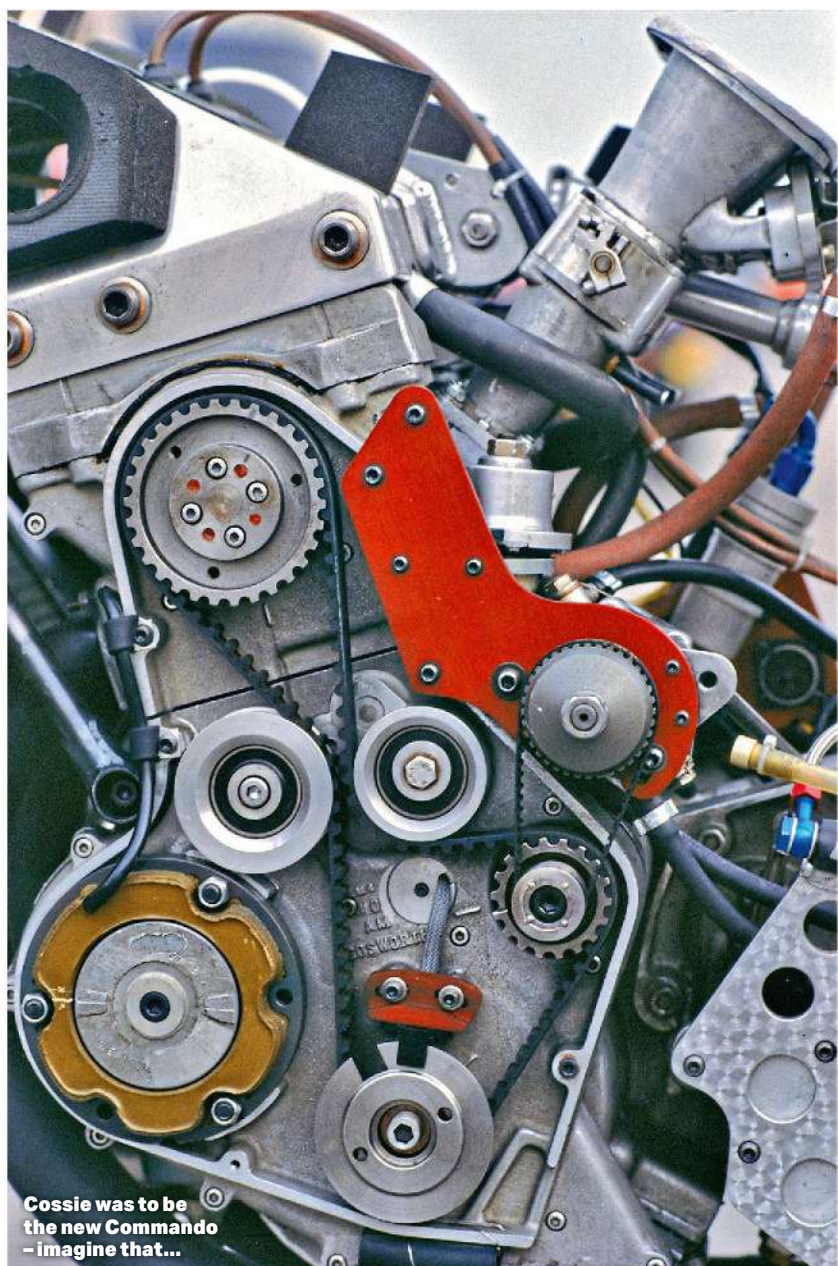
It's very much from ye olden days, but I am an enthusiastic student of any eccentricity in pursuit of a clearly defined benefit – and so the Velocette Roarer is high up my list.

Built in 1939 to take on blown BMWs and Gileras, the Roarer was a supercharged parallel twin – but not in the manner you'd imagine. Pistons rose and fell together in typical vibratory British fashion, but its progenitor Harold Willis wanted to get rid of gyroscopic precession arising from a single longitudinal crank. So, the Roarer had two – longitudinal, counter-rotating, geared in a tandem layout. It had perfect primary balance and eliminated gyroscopic effects at source. One crank drove the transmission, one the blower, and it had further interesting features – rear-exit exhausts, for example. But in just the blower and the gyroscopic elimination it foreshadowed what Kawasaki and Ducati have done more recently. Of course, others had done similar things before, but not in one engine. Brilliant.

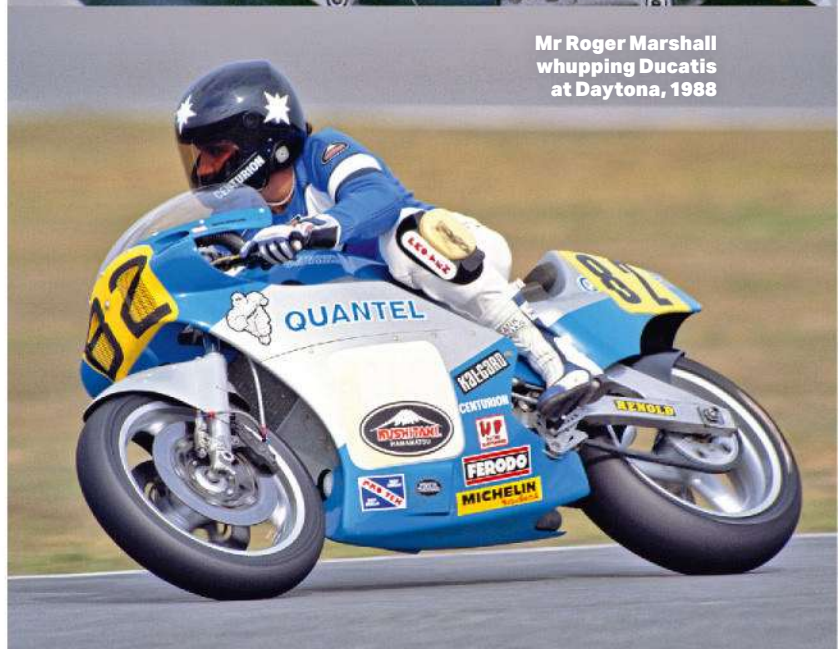
Quantel Cosworth

This engine has had so many names it's difficult to know what to call it, but let's use Quantel Cosworth. This started life as one quarter of the Cosworth DFV engine, a 2993cc V8 used in Formula One, and was designed in 1973 for Norton as the Challenge. It never achieved much in that 750cc incarnation, but in the 1980s in developed form – taken out to 825cc as the Quantel Cosworth – it most certainly did. Ilmor were involved as well, so its somewhat confused DNA was top notch.

The bike itself used the engine as a fully stressed member in an aluminium monocoque, and nearly won the 1986 Daytona Battle of the Twins (BoTT) race. Paul Lewis finished second only to the works Ducati of Marco Lucchinelli. Think on that for a moment – that was when Ducati effectively got reborn as the powerhouse of today. If the finishing order had been reversed history might have been somewhat different. In 1988, Roger Marshall beat the Ducati 851 to win the Pro Twins at Daytona, and he won BoTT meets at Spa and Assen. (I started at Cosworth in 1991, so all of this was relatively fresh. I remember some sentiments that, because of the Norton parallel twin thing, Keith Duckworth's desire to produce a V-twin was overruled. This in turn led to comments that really, they'd had to use the 'wrong quarter of the DFV'...)



Cossie was to be the new Commando – imagine that...



Mr Roger Marshall whupping Ducatis at Daytona, 1988

Wulf 500

Sticking with Norton, the Wulf two-stroke from 1976 was damned clever. The problem with conventional bike-type two-strokes is they use the crankcase as a scavange pump, to blow charge into the combustion chamber. But this necessitates the use of rolling element bearings rather than the plain ones commonly used in a four-stroke, as you now need to minimise the amount of oil in the bottom of the engine: it gets entrained and passed into the combustion chamber, either flowing through unburned (harming emissions) or reducing knock resistance. Rolling bearings don't have the durability of plain ones. They're noisy, too.

The Wulf, however, is a 'stepped piston' engine in which the base of the piston has an annular extension that runs in a larger bore, forming an annular pumping chamber. The stepped piston looks like a top hat. Additional rings around the annular extension seal oil in a conventional four-stroke-style crankcase so that plain bearings can be used. Putting two cylinders in parallel with the cranks timed 180° apart allows the pump chamber of one to scavenge the combustion chamber of the other – clever.

While Bernard Hooper at Norton did not invent the idea, he saw its potential and developed it into a viable product; the real shame is that Norton Villiers Triumph imploded just as it was ready for production. I still think it could be relevant in bike applications because it solves so

many two-stroke problems, not least oil consumption, and with modern direct injection and other technologies could be a neat concept. We can but hope – and I know the idea is being seriously looked at in other arenas.

Scott Twin

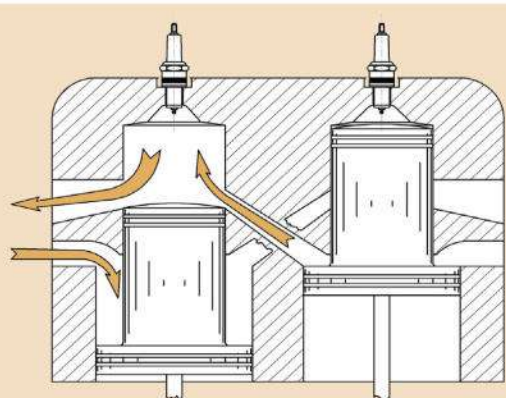
Scott two-strokes from the early 20th century were pretty incredible. In fact, Alfred Scott designed and patented the vertical twin two-stroke engine in 1904, so he could be viewed as the father of the layout. Of course, there were other configurations (the 3S triple springs to mind) but regardless he picked up on Joseph Day's two-stroke ideas and ran with them. To the point where the ACU applied a unique racing equivalency factor (1.32) to Scott's machines for three years, to give the others a chance. Can you imagine that happening to a manufacturer today? Or how Ducati would react if, in the upcoming MotoGP 850cc regulations, they were told only they were being limited to 643cc?

Scott turned this into an advertising plus, showing how much better his bikes were – which to me is God-tier cool. Plus, he was into water cooling and so (as if the foregoing wasn't enough) was truly an engine pioneer – his 450cc liquid-cooled two-stroke parallel twin predated Yamaha's RD350LC by 72 years. And, incredibly, he beat famous two-stroke engineer Walter Kaaden by about 40 years in applying rotary valves for the intake phase. He did it before the First World War... Absolutely astonishing. Anything with the name 'Scott' on the tank is worthy of veneration in my opinion. I'll say it again: absolutely astonishing.

It's easy to dismiss 'the classic British bike engine' as hopelessly outmoded tech doomed as other nations got on with development, but context is everything. So many amazing concepts were developed, only to stumble due to business reasons (Wulf); to be successful then withdrawn once a point had been made (up until it was shelved, the Norton Challenge was the only Cosworth engine not to win a race – the Quantel put that right); or be so successful as a mainstream product we all forget about it (Scott).

Blimey, we were good. And we still are – just ask anyone with a modern Hinckley triple. Over to you Triumph, to continue carrying the flame. No pressure... **BIKE**

PICS: HOOPER ENGINEERING, TIM KEETON/IMPACT IMAGES



Wulf 500 and (above) stepped pistons. Genuinely genius – and still being researched



PIC: SCOTT



TWO-SPEED SUPER SQUIRRELS

498 c.c. and 596 c.c.

FOLLOWING the same general design as the famous Squirrel, these models have a better road performance and embody numerous refinements in their equipment. As in the case of other models for which alternative engines are listed, the 498 c.c. is intended primarily for solo work whilst the 596 c.c. is suitable for either solo or sidecar work. Either model is capable of 70-75 m.p.h. 1927 improvements include wide lug-end bearings, wide front forks and wider mudguards.

Engine: "Scott" Twin Cylinder Two-Stroke, Aluminium water-cooled Cylinder Head, Alloy Frame, Medium compression. Wide lug-end bearings. Bore and Stroke, 498 c.c. 50.25 x 50.25 mm; 596 c.c. 74.5 x 51.25 mm. Mechanical Pump lubrication. Improved "Atom" piston Carburettor (with air filter) mounted on straight-through induction pipe.

Gears: "Scott" two-speed, four speeded. Standard close ratio fully 3" x 40 x 11.5. Kickstarter inter-convertible. Extra heavy 1st. gear chain throughout.

Frame: "Scott" triangulated open rear girder frame giving strength, lightness, low centre of gravity and ideal housing for all components.

Forks: Improved wide type. "Scott" system of compound springing. Riding bearings only, constant angle of trail and on lateral stability. Internal lubrication.

Tank: 3 gallon Oval Petrol Tank, unique construction. Hot mounting; petrol tap incorporates anti-siphoning device. Automatic separate circular oil tank fitted to down tube; capacity, 3 pints.

Wheels: Rear: Stamped steel hub, Journal bearings, "knock-out" spindle. Front: Automatic large size

bearing, "knock-out" spindle. Flat base rim, 600 x 65 mm. Cord Tyres.

Brakes: Internal expanding. Top Rear: 5in. Front: 5in. in action, not very powerful.

Saddle: Special Terry Spring-top saddle, giving low rider position.

Footrests: Exceptionally neat and strong, made in one piece and fitted with rubber sole.

Handbars: "Squirrel" pattern, giving perfect control without fatigue.

Mudguards: Hushmore "D" Section, 5in. wide. Front fitted with deep valance. Rear-gate front shield and underbody with mounted footings. Seat quick detachable padded metal gas-tight. Substantial rear stand of improved type. Front stand really fitted beneath engine. Equipment includes tool kit in strong metal box in handy position. Two spare valves, inflator, etc. Detachable Carrier or Luggage rack.

Finish: Front black enamel. Petrol tank artistically covered with Scott purple leather-like. Oil tank, petrol, Radiator, plated. Handbars, silver black.

Weight complete: 250 lb.

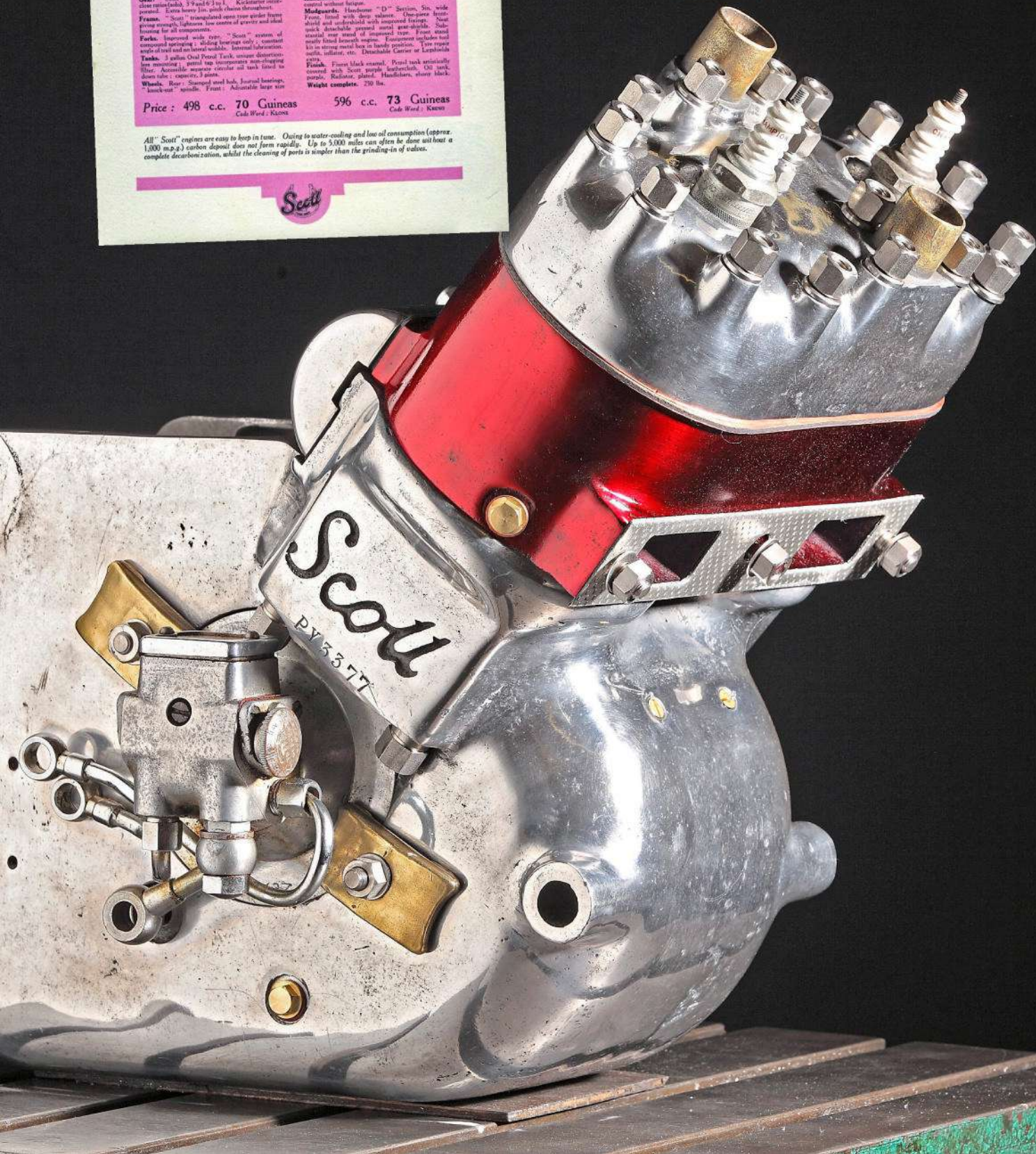
Price: 498 c.c. 70 Guineas
Cable Word: KNOX

596 c.c. 73 Guineas
Cable Word: KNOX

All "Scott" engines are easy to keep in trim. Owing to water-cooling and low oil consumption (approx. 1,000 m.p.g.) carbon deposit does not form rapidly. Up to 5,000 miles can often be done without a complete decarbonization, whilst the cleaning of ports is simpler than the grinding-in of valves.



Left: 1927 Scott brochure
-498cc version a snip at
70 Guineas. Inset: look at the
ruddy size of that flywheel!



↓
9ft below
sea level...

The Admiral Wells, Holme, Cambridgeshire. Shortly after 7am, fully fuelled on bacon sarnies and shandy. One puncture fixed already



All the way up

Eight like-minded fools, riding from the UK's lowest pub to the highest, on mopeds and scooters, in one long day. All the best ideas start in a pub...

By Luke Brackenbury

↑
1732ft above
sea level...

All the way to Tan Hill Inn, right up in North Yorkshire... and of course there are other folk there on unlikely machinery





No matter how astounding they sound at the time, most of the ideas coming out of a group of motorcycle-riding blokes sitting around a pub table on a winter's evening aren't genuinely that good. But this was one of those rare occasions where the light bulb still looked bright when we'd sobered up.

The pub is The Admiral Wells in Holme, Cambridgeshire, which has the claim of being the lowest-altitude pub in the UK. Amazing food and beer aside, it'll be a terrible place to hide out when the glaciers melt. And this starts to steer our lubricated conversation.

'People ride from here to the highest-altitude pub on pushbikes, did you know?' proclaims Yorkshire Dan Howden, wearing a T-shirt with a Honda C90 on (this particular evening two of our group around the table are wearing this same shirt). The factual quip unleashes questions. 'How far is it away?' 'Where is the Tan Hill Inn?'



Elliot – the devilishly handsome barman with hair we’re all envious about – is listening to our chat and points to a chalkboard in the corner of the pub: Tan Hill Inn to The Admiral Wells, completed by bike, 242.8 miles. It’s referring to a pedal cycle, and it sounds plenty far on a pushbike. It wouldn’t be very far at all on a large motorbike. But on a comedy moped or scooter – and for our group this means a step-thru device of no more than 125cc – this could be fun. If perhaps a little uncomfortable.

The Admiral Wells is situated close to land that’s 2.75m (9ft) below sea level. In comparison, the Tan Hill Inn is Britain’s highest public house at 528m (1732ft) above sea level, making it the same height as the CITIC Tower – the tallest building in Beijing and the tenth tallest building in the world. That’s not really important, but the fact the Tan Hill Inn is on the border of the Yorkshire Dales and the Pennines means the ride would be a delight.

We could do it in a day, probably, allowing for the many stops required by a bunch of men with decreasing bladder ranges on bikes with equally woeful tank capacities. We’d stay at the Inn, make merry, then do the return journey. Easy. We agree a date the following September to clear summer holiday commitments, let the kids go back to school, and to give us eight months to get suitable mopeds, book the time off, define the route, and decide what to have for dinner when we rock up triumphantly. Magic.

As are the times we live in, a WhatsApp group is immediately created and we all set about dedicating way

‘I wasn’t expecting to see a whiskey-bottle jerry can gaffer-taped to a seat. It’s inspired’

too much time on Facebook Marketplace asking sellers and scammers if the various mopeds and scooters are ‘still available?’. Seems this is the must-use icebreaker for potential Facebook purchases.

The group quickly becomes one of hilarity, and of education about 125s most of us had never heard of. It’s also shocking just what people are asking for of an unmolested and not rotten-as-a-pear Honda C90. You used to be able to swap one for a pack of cigarettes and a can of booze. Yet despite all the distracting bike hunting and banter, as the week of the ride draws close only half of us have bikes. No one’s booked us in at the Tan Hill. Then WhatsApp goes silent. Disaster...

Winter bites again, and the same group are sat around the same table, having exactly the same conversation. Everyone says they still want to do the ride. We pick the same date as last time, but this time immediately book rooms at the pub. We’ve made a commitment – now it has to happen.

The WhatsApp nonsense leading up to the ride is brilliant. The pieces of two-wheeled trash that we each nearly buy are hilarious, as are many of the actual pieces of crap that most of us end up with. I’ve decided I want a Honda AFS110i Wave – it’s basically a modern C90 but with fuel injection (I’m thinking of the altitude changes in the Dales) and a four-speed gearbox, but still semi-auto. I end up buying three. But that’s a story for another day...



Imagine a bad-ass biker gang... and then go as far the other way as possible



Bacon butties. Proper HP brown sauce, too. Some folk know how to live



How many bikers does it take to change a tube? Three (with a minimum of four observers)



Not even 7am and Pip's day threatens to fall flat before it's begun. Replacement tube to the rescue



That's the spirit - or in this case, at 120mpg, another 18 miles of juice



Stickers - they make everything feel official

Almost half of the group are determined to ride original Honda Cubs to match their casual wear, but their compromised top speed and the distance we'll cover means three of our gang – Jamie Smith, Pip Cossey and Mikey Hall – decide to slip 125cc pit bike engines into theirs. Yorkshire Dan eventually relents on riding his old 50cc Cub and will take his C125 Super Cub, much to our relief – he's a big lad and we want an average speed that's nearer to 40mph than 4mph.

Bikes sorted, our daft conversations turn to what to pack and what Temu-sourced cheapo accessories to fit. Facebook Groups as opposed to Marketplace becomes the new addiction. Have you seen how much tat is out there? It's amazing and terrifying in equal measure.

We decided on three days for our low-speed adventure: a long one to get to Tan Hill, and two easy days back with an overnight in Matlock Bath. The night before the ride I barely slept because of the excitement. Honestly.

The Admiral Wells kindly offers to open at 7am, just for us, so we can stuff ourselves with bacon sarnies. I'm meeting up with Pip on the way to the pub and am greeted with a puncture on the rear of his pit bike-powered C90. Twenty minutes spent getting confused over the wheel spacer set-up, and we're on our way to meet the group.

The contents of the lowest pub car park in the country would make anyone smile. I wasn't expecting to see a whiskey-bottle jerry can gaffer-taped to a seat, but Steve Carpenter's top box has fallen off on the way here. It's a truly inspired modification. And I'll end up jealous that I'm the only one who hasn't joined the sheepskin seat crowd.

Our meticulously planned route will take in the Lincolnshire Wolds and head over the Humber Bridge (free for bikes) and up across Yorkshire. The last food order at our destination is at 8pm, so this provides us with a deadline. With shandy and bacon breath, we leave the adoring crowd of one that's assembled to wave us off with a salute of scooter toots and head off to batter our way through Peterborough's rush hour. Every time we pull up at a traffic light we have Steve, who's bought a disappointingly decent Honda Innova 125, blaring out quite an eclectic playlist through a Bluetooth speaker. And, of course, every traffic light is opportunity for a drag race.

Most of us have reasonably quiet exhausts. To ensure we stay in a swarm we have an agreed maximum speed of 45mph, and with minimal wind noise we can actually natter to each other while we're riding along. It's brilliant. There's only an occasional arse-clench when handlebars connect. It's funny riding the same roads you've ridden most of your life but doing it a whole load slower. It's enjoyable in a different way; you don't want to lose momentum so you can actually scare yourself in the corners, but the straights give you more time to notice the surroundings. And chatter. And laugh.

Our first fuel stop takes longer than expected as riders change kit and reattach accessories that are entirely unnecessary for the ride. Stops will come every 60 miles or so, dictated by the piddly fuel tanks on some of the machines and the limits of rider comfort.

Twenty minutes later and we have our second puncture. This time it's Steve, and as with Pip's bike it's caused by an inner tube that has previously been repaired. Multiple times, in the case of this one. All our fine machines started with tyres that were holding pressure so replacing tubes isn't something you'd think you need to do, but the heat generated by heavily loaded bikes, blokes stuffed with



What is it about small bikes always bringing big fun?



Small, colourful, happy. And a troll



Bag for life. And for keeping your seat nice and fluffy in the elements



Yet more roadside faffing. Note wheel covers. Very MotoGP



Yes, a shopping basket. It's amazing what treasure you find on the road



Lock, SOHC and four smokey barrels



Mates, bikes, silliness and a pint. This is what it's all about

bacon and our constant tortuous high speed is enough to destroy them. Fortunately, we're carrying plenty of spares among all the other clutter.

Bobby White is also riding a Honda Innova 125, referred to as the mothership due to its large screen and enormous stockpile of parts. It's the fastest bike in our group. And now it breaks down. The 'hot' go-faster ECU has simply cried enough; fortunately, Bobby has a standard part in the stock of spares.

September promises golden autumn joy. It's not constantly delivering as we've experienced all possible weathers, from blazing sunshine to chilling heavy hail, but it's mainly blue skies as we zigzag through Yorkshire's epic landscapes. I'd led us to the Humber Bridge, and now it's Dan (who the county was named after) taking us on a back-road route ridden all from memory. Yes, there's some confusion and more than a few U-turns, but it doesn't matter – they're always an excuse to do a cheeky skid.

And I'm really enjoying the Honda Wave. It's blown a running light at some stage and has popped a fork seal bobbing across Lincolnshire, although this has made no

discernible difference to the handling. The Repsol paint job isn't as classy as the cool-looking original C90s either. But at the speeds we're going it isn't bouncing its valves off trying to keep up, and it doesn't require me to tuck in on the 'faster' bits (but when I do it shows 70mph on the clocks! Rocket ship!).

I'm also reminded just how beautiful England really is. Especially Yorkshire. The epic landscapes and charming villages make me promise to myself to come back and explore more of the area. We've travelled from the flat lands of the Fens, and with all the hills and bumps and rolling bits we can't help but keep stopping to take pictures of vistas that are a world away from where we set off. Touring on smaller, slower bikes is great if you want to actually appreciate where you're riding through.

I stop counting hilltop cows and wondering how long it must have taken to build all the stone walls because the run from Richmond to Tan Hill turns into a race. After a long, hard day the carb-fed pit bike engines aren't dealing with the altitude and climbs. It comes down to the scintillating power of my injected 109cc Wave against the mothership – the tuned Innova 125, which, it turns out, is a sneaky 143cc – on the long, narrow drags up the relentless

Low-speed statistics

- Distance: **225.9 miles**
- Time taken: **8.5 hours**
- Average speed: **26.6mph**
- Fuel used (Honda AFS110i Wave): **8.53 litres**
- Average economy: **120.4mpg**
- Cheapest pint: **£3.25**
- Most expensive pint: **£6.50**
- Inner tubes used: **3**
- Crashes: **0**
- Most expensive bike: Honda Super Cub C125 **£3,300 new**
- Cheapest bike: Honda AFS110i Wave (very London-used) **£300**
- Average rider age: **42.3 years**
- Average mental age: **17**



'Touring on smaller, slower bikes is great to appreciate where you're riding through'

hills. Hats off to Bobby. He doesn't seem at all flustered by blind crests, gravel, sheep or shit. It's possibly the best and scariest riding I've seen this side of the TT.

Yorkshire's challenging topography sees us arrive at the lofty boozer in gaps. Some of the bikes are emitting worrying smells on arrival, but the view is stunning. Beers have been earned and, remarkably, we've got a bit of time in hand until the kitchen closes. This hasn't been a giant step (thru) for mankind, but it has been a bloody brilliant day out.

The vibe of the evening is special. This is a group made up of friends and friends-of-friends, all with a similar mentality and who have all temporarily escaped our own personal realities. And it's cost barely anything: all the bikes are relatively inexpensive, and they've used hardly any fuel: my Honda's covered 225.9 miles with a best of 136mpg and a worst of 116mpg. You could travel the whole

country for a few quid. Right on cue, we meet some other idiots on stock Honda Cubs outside the pub who are riding to the 'four corners' of the UK.

The next couple of days on our excellent low-power machines are relaxed. Yes, more things break, and we have another puncture (Mikey this time). But we also stop to explore waterfalls, see low-level passes from military aircraft through deep valleys, climb rocks, find a basket, eat well, and are genuinely very merry indeed.

Will there be another 'ped crawl'? Absolutely. Mopeds (and scooters) make for monumental memories. **END**

10 big-trip essentials

1. Inner tubes
2. Makita battery-powered compressor
3. Apples
4. Winter gloves
5. Fuel cans
6. Flip-front helmets
7. Sheepskin seat covers
8. Hydration pack
9. Bluetooth speaker
10. Portable phone charger



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SCAN HERE





Mike Armitage
Editorist

Been living with a new GSX-8R and having a jolly nice time to boot.



John Westlake
Proper journo

Has been keeper of our XSR900 GP, and delivers his verdict.



Paul Lang
Fussy swine

Likes to tog himself up well and so reveals his winter... er, togs.



Ben Matthews
Outfit pilot

Has a long history with sidecars and passes on wisdom.



Matt Bainbridge
Race boss

Gaffer at Rapid Honda and able to reveal the team's 2025 plans.



Mark Graham
Oddities officer

Able to spot intriguing bikes at 100 paces... and so he does.

Advice, guidance and things to do with bikes

KNOW HOW

BIKES

Suzuki GSX-8R: Living with
Yamaha XSR900 GP: The Verdict
Speed Twin RS: New bikes
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Thing of the month

CTEK CS ONE £169

Whoa, hang on. £169 for a battery charger? Erm... yes. But the CS ONE is ace. The clamps can go on either terminal and are spark-free if they touch. It revived the very tired lead-acid battery on my TDR250, and can restore past-it lithium ones, too. It'll act as a power supply to the bike while the battery is removed, does the trickle thing, and connects to an app that shows your battery health, charge time remaining and more. Five-year warranty, too. Pricey, but great.

Mike Armitage
ctek.com





TOKEN GESTURE

Conveniently, Suzuki have provided somewhere to place a passenger, and they even get a grab whatsit. The seat-to-peg bit is okay, but the perch itself is just that. Teenage son Ed struggled with the strap and had a sore arse after an hour. Three hours and he'd really had enough.



ESSENTIALS ONLY

My fat-bummed GSX-R750 SRAD has enough room under the seat hump for a sack of spuds. The thin, lithe, modern GSX-8R doesn't. You need to decide if your wallet, phone or teddy bear are most important. Even my Oxford disc lock only fits with a bit of jiggling.



NICE AND SIMPLE

No subframe bungee points; instead, there are two fabric straps that can be unfurled from under the pillion pad. They're handy, but it'd be better if there were two either side – or if they were further back, so you could use these along with the hooks on the pillion 'peg hangers.

[**Living with**]

Suzuki

Great to ride, looks the part... but what's it really like day to day? **Mike Armitage** reports after 1500 miles



LIKE IT SHOULD BE

Think twin, and you think rumbling noise, bottom-end drive and a romping midrange. And that's what the 776cc Suzuki delivers. It's a cracking, easy, flexible-yet-fast motor. Quickshifter does a decent enough job of shifting quickly, too.

GSX-8R



THE SIMPLEST THINGS

Threading the 8R from my garage to the road means passing through a garden gate and teasing past a car. The fold-in mirrors make this a doddle, and they click back into place without you having to reset the lenses and faff about. Simple and great.



HOW'D THEY DO THAT, THEN?

Katana-alike headlamps are teeny-tiny, but the light emitted is at odds with their scale. Dip beam is bright and has an impressive reach, while main beam illuminates the road ahead like a searchlight. Shame the spread is a bit too cropped off.



GLORIOUSLY INSPIRING

I love the GSX-8R's front end. The Nissin calipers have fabulous feel and oodles of power, and the plush, controlled forks are as unflustered by B-road frolics as bumps on a soaking commute. The front fills me with confidence. I even like the lipstick wheels.



JUST CLEVER ENOUGH

The important bits are clear enough for tired eyes to see through a dirty visor, and there's a decent amount of info and data without the display being fussy. Easy-to-use switchgear control as well. Low fuel lamp is easy to miss, but hey – look at that average economy.

‘Yes, it resembles a 1990s GP hero, but it’s a sportsbike for the modern age’

[The Verdict]

‘You spend a lot of time swooning’

If you’re of a certain age and have watched a bit of racing, Yamaha’s **XSR900 GP** may well be your forever motorcycle. **John Westlake** certainly thinks so

Things that happen when you spend three months with the XSR900 GP, #1: you spend a disproportionate amount of time gazing at it. I never tire of lingering in the shed after each ride, savouring the fact that right there between my lawn mower and some tins of paint is Wayne Rainey’s YZR500. Or maybe Eddie Lawson’s. Or Niall Mackenzie’s – depends which daydream I’m having. Obviously it doesn’t look, sound or smell like a YZR, but the trigger is there – I’ve never had such a warm nostalgic glow from a mass-produced bike.

But look closely at it, and there are enough neat touches to make you believe the designers are just as smitten by those old GP bikes. R clips on the screen, fairing side blisters, 1990s-sparse cockpit...

Things That Happen, #2: mates reassess their life choices. Join the lads for a ride out and the XSR provokes much reminiscing about the Donington GP in 1989 or whenever. But two mates are glancing at their own steeds – and when I tell them ‘you can get one for £150 a month on PCP with a £2500 deposit’, I can hear cogs grinding under the vacant looks on their fizzogs, estimating part-exchange values.

This also happens electronically. I send a pic of the bike to my mate Adam who is so smitten that we sort the insurance so he can have a go. The intelligible parts of his post-ride gibber are: ‘That wrenched me

right back to why I adore sports motorcycles, but this is packaged for the real world. It’s one of the most pleasurable bikes I’ve ever ridden.’

It even works on those who could afford a YZR500, like Richard Hammond (*Bike*, September). ‘It feels fizzy, light and nimble without being shrieking or mad,’ he gushed. ‘It’s a lesson in how to do a retro.’

Hammond’s assessment brings us to Things That Happen, #3: you will ride it everywhere. The riding position is just the right side of aggressive. I wouldn’t recommend it for town commutes, but all else is fine: it’s genuinely practical. The only thing is the tail unit precludes any luggage. You could remove it, but that would be sacrilege.

So, to Things That Happen, #4: the indicator button will drive you nuts. It’s a toggle; press one side for left or right, press again to cancel. Except they self-cancel. But not always. So you have to keep looking down to check them. Cocking things.

But let’s not end on its one niggle. Things that Happen, #5 is best of all: you ride everywhere grinning. A whiff of throttle at 4000rpm sends you snorting out of corners like a supernaked while a nudge of the ‘bars flicks you into corners like a superbike. Yet the ride is compliant enough to cope with shonky B-roads. Yes, it resembles a 1990s GP hero, but the XSR900 GP is a sportsbike for the modern age. **JW**



Hammond fails to hide frustrations as rambling editor delays a ride out



Pearlescent paint adds more sparkle



FACTS AND FIGURES

Wet weight

193kg

Top speed

140mph

Fuel figures

47 MPG AVERAGE

Tank size: **14 litres**

Distance to fuel light: **110 miles**

Range: **145 miles**

Price £12,506 **Engine** 890cc 12v DOHC inline triple **Power** 117bhp @ 10,000rpm (claimed) **Torque** 69 lb.ft @ 7000rpm (claimed) **Rake/trail** 25.2°/110mm **Wheelbase** 1500mm **Seat height** 835mm **Colours** black/grey, red/white **Availability** now

MY FAVOURITE BITS



» R&G LEVER GUARD, £35.41

You'll be wanting to take the GP on track because the brakes are strong and it handles beautifully. So you need a lever guard. And maybe some crash bungs.



» RACER PACK, £2750

Strong money for fairing lowers, a tinted screen and an Akra (full system, mind), but look at it. It's an official pack so it should all fit properly, too.



» YAMAHA TANK BAG, £264

Gorgeous tail unit rules out luggage at that end, so you need this. It's expensive but top notch. Couple it with a ruckie and weekends away become feasible.

THE LAST WORD

The XSR900 GP is a bike that satisfies on every level. The inline-three motor is thrilling, handling is a just-so blend of nimbleness and stability, and comfort is good enough for UK B-roads. It's a hoot. Styling adds another layer of joy – it's what made it our Bike of the Year. But what's really special is that, three months in, none of the GP's initial wow and fizz has faded; its new-bike 'wow' remains intact. It still makes us gawp, causes mushy insides, makes us desperate to ride. Can't ever imagine feeling any other way. **Bike**

[Knowledge]

New bikes



Bit different
to the 1937
Speed Twin...

Triumph Speed Twin RS

Imagine an eye-poking supernaked in a smart tweed suit...

What's new? It's the very fine Speed Twin 1200 with blingy chassis parts, five extra horses, a quickshifter, lean-aware traction control, and a more modern display replacing the twin dials. With lighter wheels and shorter pipes, ready-to-frolic weight is down to 216kg.

Bike's opinion Sure, the new RS is kind-of hefty next to a full-on modern supernaked and the chassis is set up for on-road stability.

However, with its firmer suspension, increased rear ride height and sporty tyres, the Triumph is a joy to thread through a series of turns. It's retained just enough road-bike plushness, too.

The extra oomph of the 1200cc twin brings even more wallop and excitement, while still being soft and cuddly when you need it to be. Looks, feel, performance and noise are all near enough spot-on. £14,495 ain't cheap – but if you're missing the discontinued Thruxton, this is finer.



It's not very
1960s. Does
anyone care?

Kawasaki Ninja 1100SX

Gentle nudges keep Kwak's oh-so-popular sports tourer feeling fresh

What's new? The name – it's now the 1100SX, not the 1000SX. The 3mm longer stroke in the inline-four motor takes it from 1043cc to 1099cc; cams are milder, intake ports are reworked and the flywheel's heavier, with power dropping from 140bhp at 10,000rpm to 134bhp at 9000rpm. But good news: there's more torque and increased low-rev shunt. There's also a new higher-spec SE version.

Bike's opinion It's urgent, grunty, handles brilliantly, with lots of comfort and not much wind noise. But this was all true of the 1000, and the extra punch isn't obvious. The 14-grand SE model's Öhlins shock brings plushness and more control when cracking on, though it's a shame it hasn't got the Versys 1100's electronic suspension. Still a great bike, but not worth trading in your existing SX.



If it ain't broke
and all that



NT1100: now with added Hondaness

Honda NT1100

It's Europe's favourite upright sports tourer – and now it's even better

What's new? More midrange grunt, self-adjusting electronic suspension, an even-slicker DCT (Dual Clutch Transmission) and a less fatty screen. Larger panniers that will swallow a full-face hat, too. Oh, and a styling nudge.

Bike's opinion We've always been big fans of the plush, comfortable, quality, effortless NT1100. The changes make it even more effective – it's more fun to ride, yet also even more practical and, dare we say it, sensible. At £12,679, this is Honda ensuring the NT is still the commuter-semi-adventure-all-round-tourist (is that a class?) of choice.



Should have taken an open face...

Royal Enfield Classic 650

Larger twin-cylinder version of Enfield's super-popular 350

What's new? Super Meteor 650 is rejigged to echo the Classic 350. Showa forks get hidden in the 1950s-style makeover, with a wide-barred riding position and low mid-set footrests. Imagine cross-breeding the 650 with the old Bullet 500 and you're about there.

Bike's opinion Part retro, part cruiser, entirely pleasing. Enfield's parallel twin is as charming as ever, the relaxed feel and steady chassis feel 'right' swinging about steadily, and for £6499 the finish is fabulous. Ground clearance dampens enthusiasm, but if you want to hurl it about buy the sharper Interceptor instead.



Humble Himmy is an ace do-anything tool

[Why I love my...]

2018 Enfield Himalayan

Ian Cooper on how the trailie chugged into owners' hearts



When the Himmy was released, there wasn't anything like it.

It was a mountain goat rather than a gazelle – it wasn't graceful or beautiful, but it could do anything and was greater than the sum of its parts.

It cost £4199 – back then you could spend more than that on a scooter that had about the same fuel economy. You could ride it as a commuter, you could do gentle trails, you could treat it like a classic and go for a potter round – that long-stroke engine is just lovely. Having owned, sold, customised [after falling in love with Enfields, Ian started Cooperb, selling and modifying them] and of course ridden plenty, I know those early Himalayans are really special.

There were a few issues with the first bikes, but if a good mechanic set them up properly, those problems disappeared. So, for example, the head race grease wasn't synthetic so the bearings used to go. But if you replaced it they lasted okay. There was

a problem with the swingarm pivot too, which was an easy fix. You'd have to do the valve clearances because they were usually too tight. The spokes needed greasing because otherwise you'd never be able to tighten them up on the second or third service. It wasn't like a Honda – you couldn't just get a Himalayan out the crate, put petrol in it and send it out. But it was a

four grand motorbike. You just had to predict what was going to go wrong – so, for example, if you've done a proper off-road trip, you needed to strip and regrease the calipers to stop them sticking.

It's difficult to explain why I love the Himalayan so much – it's like trying to describe why you love your dog to someone who hates dogs. They won't listen and ultimately can't understand. But as any dog lover will tell you, if you don't have one, you're missing out.

» **Thanks to Ian's Facebook group: Royal Enfield Himalayan & Scram 411 & 450 Owners UK**

'Mountain goat rather than gazelle'

Buying tips

» **What to look for** As well as the under-greased bearings, check for water in the clocks (mist is a giveaway). Servicing is every 3000 miles, so make sure it's not been skipped, and there was a recall on the ByBre brakes. The

dash's digital compass will be rubbish.

» **What to pay** from £1950 (private)

» **Insurance** go to mcncompare.com

MCN COMPARE

[Knowledge]

Listings

This isn't a limp brochure-style round-up of all the bikes you can buy. No, your guide is far more useful as it **only contains bikes that we have tested**, with comparable on-the-road prices plus data, expert opinion and must-know detail gathered by fussy full-time testers. We do hundreds of thousands of miles, dyno, datalog, weigh and answer the big questions. Don't buy a new bike without reading this first.

BIKE	PRICE	ENGINE	TOPSPEED	POWER	MPG	BIKEVERDICT	RATING	TESTED
APRILIA uk.aprilia.com , 00800 15565500 <i>Bike's choice: Tuono Factory defines the supernaked class... but we'd buy an RS660</i>								
RSV4 Factory	£23,000	1099cc V4	186mph*	214bhp**	45mpg	Ace engine, great suspension and electronics, exemplary steering. Also tiny, and depreciates.	9/10	Jul'21
Tuono V4 Factory	£18,100	1077cc V4	165mph	159bhp	35mpg	Superb motor, crisp chassis, exotic-yet-friendly. Cool. Non-Factory model is every-day usable.	10/10	Jul'24
Tuareg 660	£10,600	659cc twin	120mph*	79bhp**	59mpg**	Ténéré rival is less rounded but has more tech and better suspension. Rugged, fun, but a bit raw.	8/10	Oct'22
RS660	£10,300	659cc twin	139mph	91bhp	45mpg	Sportsbike handling, punch and tech; sports-tourer comfort and usability. Impressive thing.	10/10	Dec'24
Tuono 660	£9700	659cc twin	135mph*	90bhp*	50mpg	Comfier and more agile than RS660, more fun than a Street Triple. Fancier Factory version £10k.	9/10	Jun'21
ARIEL arielmotor.co.uk , 01460 78817 <i>Bike's choice: loads of options and extras, but it's got to have girder forks</i>								
Ace	£28,345	1237cc V4	165mph**	173bhp**	40mpg*	Machined alloy frame, Honda V4, girder forks, endless choices. Fast, capable, work of art.	8/10	Jun'19
BENELLI benelli.com , 0844 4128450 <i>Bike's choice: not ridden it yet, but the Leoncino 800 Trail looks tidy...</i>								
752 S	£7899	754cc twin	95mph*	75bhp**	55mpg	Designed in Italy, built in China. Looks a bit disjointed but rides well – not MT-07 league, but good.	7/10	Jul'20
TRK 502	£6199	500cc twin	95mph*	46bhp**	72mpg**	Lacks a little balance and refinement, but good value distance tool. Italy's best-selling big bike.	6/10	Mar'18
BIMOTA bimotauk.co.uk , 01603 920240 <i>Bike's choice: radical, extreme, whacky, beautiful... who wouldn't want a Tesi?</i>								
Tesi H2	£59,000	998cc V4	190mph*	237bhp**	28mpg	Epic supercharged motor in delicious hub-steered chassis. Exquisite, wild, thirsty, expensive.	8/10	Sep'21
BMW bmw-motorrad.co.uk , 0800 777155 <i>Bike's choice: yeah, it's predictable... but brilliance of the GS can't be ignored</i>								
R18 Classic	£19,540	1802cc flat twin	115mph*	91bhp**	51mpg	Ace boxer cruiser spoils a tad by its slightly Harley-ish screen and bags, but still a tidy device.	8/10	May'21
R18	£17,480	1802cc flat twin	113mph	87bhp	50mpg	Top mix of modernity, quality and tradition. Roctane model (£22k) has less bling, more handling.	9/10	Jul'21
K1600GT	£21,100	1649cc inline 6	154mph**	158bhp**	48mpg**	Magical motor, amazing agility, self-levelling suspension, all the toys... It's a sporty-super-tourer.	9/10	Jul'22
R1300GS TE	£18,465	1300cc flat twin	135mph**	138bhp	49mpg	Less weight, more oomph, fancy toys – it's the best big GS yet. But the Ducati Multi V4 is slicker...	9/10	Jul'24
R1250RT	£17,350	1254cc flat twin	142mph	117bhp	50mpg	Go-to tourer isn't to all tastes but you can't argue that the variable-valve radar-shod twin is top.	9/10	Dec'21
R1250RS SE	£15,410	1254cc flat twin	139mph	127bhp	50mpg	Fast, comfy, accomplished, lots of tech – sports-tourers aren't dead. Not perfect, but it's close.	9/10	May'20
R1250R	£12,330	1254cc flat twin	150mph*	134bhp**	60mpg**	Ace variable-valve motor in friendly, comfy, capable chassis. Better pure road bike than a GS?	9/10	Aug'19
R12 nineT	£14,420	1170cc flat twin	140mph*	108bhp**	55mpg**	High-quality retro with thumping twin, solid handling, top details, and more tech than ever. Ace.	9/10	May'24
M1000RR	£36,040	999cc inline 4	195mph*	209bhp**	36mpg*	Wild homologation exotic with stupid power and wings – yet you can ride it to work. Mind-blowing.	9/10	Dec'23
S1000RR Sport	£18,610	998cc inline 4	190mph*	207bhp**	44mpg**	Faster, sharper and more high-tech than ever, yet still pleasingly usable. Wow. Base model £17,150.	10/10	Mar'22
S1000XR	£15,740	998cc inline 4	155mph	161bhp	43mpg	High-rise sportsbike. Fast, agile, well equipped, odd seat. M-XR version (£22,580) is sublime...	8/10	Mar'23
S1000R Sport	£15,315	998cc inline 4	167mph	163bhp	48mpg	Not shouty, but epic: agility, ride, engine and spec are superb. M1000R (£19,480) not worth extra.	10/10	Aug'22
F900XR	£10,350	895cc twin	130mph*	100bhp	50mpg	Easy-to-ride Tracer rival with eager twin, quality chassis, fine spec. Very good. Naked R is 'meh'.	8/10	Feb'24
F900GS	£11,995	895cc twin	130mph*	103bhp**	60mpg**	Better on road and trail than previous 850. Not full of character, but the best GS for greenlaning.	8/10	May'24
F750GS	£8995	853cc twin	110mph*	76bhp	69mpg**	Slim front tyre and 19in wheel make this detuned 850 a better road bike. But lacks some 'wow'.	7/10	May'18
G310GS	£5890	313cc single	88mph**	34bhp**	84mpg**	Decent quality, easy to ride, but missing a defining GS character. Not peanuts, but good.	7/10	Mar'18
BSA bsacompany.co.uk <i>Bike's choice: there's only one model so far, good job it's quite compelling...</i>								
Gold Star	£6300	652cc single	105mph*	43bhp	58mpg	A2-legal retro with '50s style, decent quality and iconic badge. For laid-back Sunday pootles.	8/10	Apr'23
CCM ccm-motorcycles.com , 01204 544930 <i>Bike's choice: of the various Spitfire variants the flat-tracker models look coolest</i>								
Spitfire Bobber	£10,585	600cc single	100mph*	55bhp**	56mpg	Curious mix of laid-back bobber styling with stiff chassis and revvy power. Not mega, but good.	8/10	Jan'20
CFMOTO cfmoto.co.uk <i>Bike's choice: Chinese bikes come of age – 800NK stands ruddy close to established rivals</i>								
800NK Sport	£6999	799cc twin	130mph*	94bhp**	45mpg*	Basically it's KTM 790 Duke with a few different parts and fresh looks. It's good and it's cheap.	8/10	Nov'23
700CL-X Heritage	£6999	693cc twin	117mph	64bhp**	55mpg	Chirpy, fun, usable, good spec, long warranty. It's good... but no longer cheap next to finer rivals.	7/10	Mar'23
DUCATI ducatiuk.com , 0845 718500 <i>Bike's choice: effective, fun and funky, the DesertX is so damn desirable</i>								
Panigale V4 R	£39,151	998cc V4	195mph*	215bhp**	35mpg**	Screaming, sharp, ballistic homologation tool. Amazing. But cheaper S is as good for most of us.	8/10	Nov'23
Diavel V4	£23,751	1158cc V4	150mph*	166bhp**	44mpg**	Caricature looks, raked stance, wild power, silly tail lights. And amazing. Not for everyone, mind.	8/10	Apr'23
Multistrada V4 Rally	£20,651	1158cc V4	155mph*	170bhp**	43mpg**	Most sophisticated, rounded, clever Ducati ever. Staggeringly complete. Pricey, yes. Also epic.	10/10	Nov'23
Panigale V4 S	£27,651	1103cc V4	191mph	203bhp	39mpg	Stupid-fast, sharp, needs working to get the best out, but still feels mega to 'normal' folk. Wow.	9/10	Feb'22
Streetfighter V4 S	£23,661	1103cc V4	169mph	181bhp	34mpg	Fast, sexy, loud, desirable... but constantly a full-on experience. SP2 version (£32k) even sillier.	8/10	Jul'24
Scrambler 1100 Pro	£12,051	1079cc V-twin	110mph*	83bhp**	45mpg*	1100 Evo-engined, easy-riding Scrambler has charming twin and more comfort than 800s.	8/10	Nov'22
Panigale V2	£16,951	955cc V-twin	169mph	140bhp	45mpg	'Entry-level' superbike is fast yet friendly, focused yet usable. Better for most than the hairy V4.	9/10	May'22
Streetfighter V2	£16,151	955cc V-twin	160mph*	151bhp**	45mpg**	Stripped-down Pani' V2 makes more sense than its wild V4 sibling. Still stiff and sporty, mind.	8/10	Aug'22
Multistrada V2 S	£15,551	937cc V-twin	135mph	111bhp	48mpg**	It's proper: eager motor, easy handling, effective semi-active ride, manageable, classy. Mega.	9/10	Jan'22
DesertX	£14,951	937cc V-twin	130mph*	110bhp**	41mpg	Sexy dual-purpose tool perfectly balances road and off-road needs. Our 2022 Bike of the Year.	10/10	Oct'22
SuperSport 950	£14,251	937cc V-twin	145mph*	113bhp**	43mpg	Not super fast or whizzpop, but a top, usable, sporty (and overlooked) road bike for normal folk.	9/10	Jan'18
Monster	£11,451	937cc V-twin	135mph*	110bhp**	45mpg*	Light, fun, usable, quality roadster with badge appeal. Mega. SP (£14k) sharper but less usable.	10/10	Feb'22
Scrambler Icon	£10,160	803cc V-twin	123mph	72bhp*	47mpg	Image and quality matched by much-improved dynamic. Easy in town, great on backroads.	8/10	Jan'24
Hyper' 698 Mono	£12,067	659cc single	123mph	76bhp**	59mpg	Fruitiest single ever is light, responsive, engaging. But it craves twisty roads and a skilled rider.	8/10	Oct'24
ENERGICA motocorsa.co.uk , 01747 811196 <i>Bike's choice: they build a sportsbike, but Esse Esse makes more sense in cluttered UK</i>								
Eva Esse Esse9	£24,590	electric motor	125mph**	87bhp	60mpc	Great acceleration, response, quality. Cheaper than was, but still pricey. Got a charging point?	7/10	Aug'18
Eva Ribelle	£26,690	electric motor	123mph	144bhp	112mpc	Performance and handling to rival (most) petrol supernakeds. Best road-going electric bike.	7/10	Apr'20



The alternative BMW

► 1981 Motorcycle Show, NEC, and this is the new feet-forward BMW. But that's Booleroo Motor Works, not Bayerische Motoren Werke. It has the German firm's engine though, being built around an R90S engine and rear end and featuring leading-link front suspension and a huge 44.5-litre tank – that's 9.8 gallons. Tandem seating gives a car-like feet-forward stance, with the possibility of an upgrade to three perches. What a thing.

ROAD TEST BACK ISSUES

BLUE = Available just on iPad
RED = Available on iPad and Android
ORANGE = Available in print only

** Claimed * Estimated

BIKE	PRICE	ENGINE	TOPSPEED	POWER	MPG	BIKEVERDICT	RATING	TESTED
FANTIC fanticmotoruk.com <i>Bike's choice: there are three versions of the Cabellero, but just go for the best colour (so that's the Scrambler)</i>								
Caballero 700	£9499	689cc twin	115mph*	74bhp*	46mpg*	Retro scrambler built around Yam's great MT-07 motor. Good, has its moments... but not ace.	7/10	Jan'24
Caballero 500	£6749	449cc single	100mph*	43bhp*	60mpg	Rev-happy, ex-enduro single in a light, good-quality package. Frantic on long rides, but top fun.	8/10	Oct'19
HARLEY-DAVIDSON harley-davidson.com, 0871 6412508 <i>Bike's choice: the Fat Bob has looks, finish, good ride... and funny name</i>								
CVO Street Glide	£38,177	1868cc V-twin	115mph*	80bhp*	50mpg	Bold, loud, glitzy, pricey. Most refined and usable big H-D twin yet, let down by choppy ride.	8/10	Nov'17
Low Rider S	£19,677	1868cc V-twin	115mph	93bhp*	50mpg**	Top looks and noise, more fun to ride than you think. But better in California than Croydon.	6/10	Jan'20
Ultra Limited	£30,277	1745cc V-twin	105mph*	67bhp*	43mpg	H-D take on a tourer. Best-ever ride and handling, water-cooled heads. Good, if not ace.	7/10	Nov'13
LiveWire	£28,995	electric motor	115mph*	104bhp**	90mpc	Rapid, jet-like noise, fine handling, smooth, expensive. Soon to be branded LiveWire, not H-D.	7/10	Oct'19
Road Glide CVO Anniv'	£50,677	1923cc V-twin	105mph*	105bhp**	43mpg**	The defining H-D full-dress tourer with extra bling. Luxurious, surprising, expensive... unique.	8/10	Sep'23
Street Glide Special	£28,077	1745cc V-twin	115mph*	40bhp*	45mpg*	Classic looks, decent suspension, good finish and latest 8v motor is the best yet. Fine thing.	8/10	Dec'16
Sport Glide	£18,177	1745cc V-twin	116mph	99bhp	51mpg	Hammering engine, civil road manners. One of the most appealing H-Ds – and now cheaper.	7/10	Sep'18
Fat Bob	£19,277	1745cc V-twin	115mph*	75bhp*	44mpg**	Bold looks, fine details, huge punch, and surprisingly usable. There's an 1868cc option too.	8/10	Feb'18
Breakout	£24,477	1745cc V-twin	115mph*	75bhp*	50mpg**	Low-slung, drag-inspired cruiser that rides better than expected. Classy, refined hot-rod.	8/10	Dec'17
Street Bob	£16,977	1745cc V-twin	110mph*	75bhp*	50mpg**	Classic chopper-ish lines, clean handling, modern 8v power. But Fat Bob is far better.	6/10	Dec'17
Softail Standard	£16,277	1745cc V-twin	110mph*	86bhp**	48mpg	Harley's entry-level bike is £13k. It's a meat-and-potatoes Harley – charming, but limited ability.	6/10	Jun'21
Pan America Special	£19,177	1252cc V-twin	135mph**	148bhp**	43mpg	Comfy, composed, brisk, lots of equipment. Very good, but not quite a GS or Multistrada rival.	8/10	Sep'21
Sportster S	£16,177	1252cc V-twin	120mph*	119bhp**	50mpg	Fastest, smoothest, best handling, most techy Harley cruiser ever. Ace... but lacks the H-D feel.	8/10	Nov'21
HONDA honda.co.uk/motorcycles, 0845 2008000 <i>Bike's choice: Hornet's good, Blade's epic... but have you ridden an NT1100? Great tool</i>								
GL1800 Gold Wing Tour	£29,349	1833cc flat-six	112mph	125bhp**	51mpg	Huge, OTT, but smart suspension, toys and utter refinement mean it's still the grand-tour king.	8/10	Dec'22
CBR1000RR-R Blade SP	£23,499	1000cc inline 4	185mph*	215bhp**	42mpg**	Wild HRC-polished race rep is demanding and pointless. But also hi-tech, classy and exquisite.	9/10	Jul'24
Africa Twin Adv' Sport	£14,749	1084cc twin	130mph*	94bhp	44mpg	All the tech, plush optional semi-active, classy feel, huge range. And daft switchgear. Hey-ho.	9/10	Nov'24
Africa Twin	£13,049	1084cc twin	130mph*	94bhp	47mpg	Feels like a big, refined enduro bike, so is different to a GS. Cheaper too. Daft switches and dash.	8/10	Jul'24
NT1100	£12,499	1084cc V-twin	123mph	97bhp	52mpg	Cross between Africa Twin and Deauville. Not exciting, but a high-spec, super-comfy tourer.	9/10	May'24
CMX1100 Rebel	£9599	1084cc twin	125mph*	86bhp**	52mpg	Africa Twin motor in cheery, usable, well-made cruiser. Not plush, but fun and very affordable.	8/10	Jan'22
CB1000R	£11,649	998cc inline 4	145mph	135bhp	46mpg	Fast, luxurious, fabulous quality – and has a touch of the soul Honda have been lacking. Nice.	8/10	Dec'21
XL750 Transalp	£9499	755cc twin	135mph*	91bhp*	58mpg	Smooth, easy to ride, great ergonomics, and cool colours. But revvy twin doesn't suit the bike.	8/10	Aug'23
CB750 Hornet	£6999	755cc twin	140mph*	91bhp**	65mpg**	Simple, honest, fun, great spec, class-leading power – and affordable too. But GSX-8S is nicer...	9/10	Dec'23
X-ADV	£11,099	745cc twin	105mph*	54bhp**	70mpg*	Off-road scooter you'll never take off-road. Pricy too. But also practical, enjoyable and top fun.	8/10	Jul'18
Forza 750	£10,399	745cc twin	110mph*	54bhp**	70mpg	Capable bike with looks and practicality of a scooter. And DCT. Odd concept, ace execution.	9/10	May'21
NC750X	£7849	745cc twin	115mph*	58bhp**	70mpg	Flexible twin, big mpg, agile, clever storage. Not flash, but very useful. DCT (E830) is worth it.	10/10	Nov'21
CBR650R E-Clutch	£8699	649cc inline 4	138mph	86bhp	54mpg	Flexible, handsome, fun, fast-enough road sportsbike. Smart auto clutch is genuinely useful.	8/10	Aug'24
CB650R	£7699	649cc inline 4	140mph	93bhp**	50mpg	Naked version of CBR (above) is fabulously balanced. Quality, dynamic, value all superb.	9/10	May'19
CBR600RR	£10,499	599cc inline 4	170mph*	119bhp**	52mpg**	Shrieking power, epic agility, pinpoint steering, top quality. Tiny and demanding, yes. But mega.	9/10	Oct'24
CB500X	£6699	471cc twin	110mph*	43bhp	68mpg*	Well-made, able, A2 adventure bike. Naked F (E6099) and faired R (E6599) are even nicer.	7/10	May'19
CRF300L	£5749	286cc single	80mph*	27bhp**	70mpg*	Fit green-laner, easy commuter, bit quicker than old 250. Rally (E6499) has big tank and screen.	7/10	Aug'22
Super Cub	£3749	125cc single	65mph*	9.2bhp	124mpg	Descendent of iconic step-thru' is charming. Ownership by urban folk should be compulsory.	8/10	Jul'19
HUSQVARNA husqvarnamotorcycles.com/gb <i>Bike's choice: Supermoto is desirable, funky, silly... and yet usable day-to-day</i>								
Norden 901	£12,699	889cc twin	130mph*	103bhp**	63mpg**	Attractive reworking of KTM 890 Adventure. Capable, nicely made, but lacks a 'wow' moment.	7/10	Oct'22
701 Supermoto	£9799	693cc single	121mph	71bhp	54mpg	Engaging, fun at sensible speed, frugal, sexy, friendlier than it looks. Proper midweight tool.	9/10	Sep'17
701 Enduro	£9799	693cc single	120mph*	71bhp	54mpg	Proper dirt bike, yet refined, frugal and plush on the road. Big-tank LR (long range) version, too.	9/10	Apr'19
Svartpilen 401	£5499	375cc single	105mph*	43bhp**	65mpg*	Built for A2 riders avoiding the mainstream. Essentially KTM's fine 390 Duke with more style.	7/10	Jul'18
INDIAN indianmotorcycle.co.uk <i>Bike's choice: classic character, modern quality, unique feel – Scout is a standout cruiser</i>								
Roadmaster	£28,295	1890cc V-twin	110mph*	89bhp*	40mpg*	Fully-loaded, over-the-top celebration of trad' USA touring opulence is actually very good.	7/10	May'15
Chief Dark Horse	£17,495	1890cc V-twin	120mph*	89bhp*	60mpg	Big twin has stripped-back cool, walloping drive, surprising agility. Engaging trad' cruiser.	8/10	Feb'24
Challenger	£26,795	1770cc V-twin	112mph**	122bhp*	46mpg*	Full-on tourer with ace water-cooled motor, physics-defying chassis, full tech. Watch out, H-D.	8/10	Jan'20
101 Scout	£16,095	1250cc V-twin	120mph*	110bhp	40mpg*	Impressive mix of trad' cruiser flair and sporty (ish) credentials. Engaging, amusing, classy.	8/10	Aug'24
FTR1200R Carbon	£16,695	1203cc V-twin	140mph*	123bhp**	38mpg	Stylish, high-quality, sporty retro with ace V-twin. We preferred it with the old 19in wheel, mind.	8/10	Nov'22
KAWASAKI kawasaki.co.uk, 01628 856750 <i>Bike's choice: has to be the Ninja Z H2. Friendly, usable, yet suitably deranged</i>								
Versys 1000 SE GT	£17,435	1043cc inline 4	144mph	118bhp**	42mpg	Top-spec Versys with all the toys, luxurious ride, luggage... Ace two-up tourer, but expensive.	7/10	Feb'24
Versys 1000 S	£13,745	1043cc inline 4	144mph	114bhp	47mpg	High-rise, high-spec 'adventure tourer' is great. Not much of a looker, mind. Very overlooked.	8/10	Aug'22
Ninja 1000SX	£12,515	1043cc inline 4	149mph	140bhp**	42mpg	The UK's fave sports-tourer is smooth, refined, well equipped. Looks a bit dated, but still cuts it.	9/10	May'22
Ninja H2 SX SE	£25,815	998cc inline 4	186mph*	197bhp**	39mpg	Sports-touring exotica. Not perfect, but classy, usable, and that motor... Base H2 SX is £21,735.	8/10	Jun'19
Z H2 SE	£19,965	998cc inline 4	175mph*	197bhp**	34mpg	The impressive Z H2 (below) with fine semi-active ride. It's the thinking rider's supernaked.	9/10	Jul'21
Z H2	£17,465	998cc inline 4	175mph*	197bhp**	34mpg	Mega blown H2 motor in bespoke naked chassis. Far more road focus than supernaked rivals.	8/10	Oct'20
Ninja ZX-10RR	£24,955	998cc inline 4	180mph	189bhp	44mpg	The already-capable ZX-10R with tuned motor and fancy wheels: basically a base for racing.	9/10	Jun'18



Fuel vending machine

■ Honda will start swappable battery trials in February. They already have a battery sharing service in Japan, India, Indonesia and Thailand, and the new stations in Malmö, Sweden, will run for a year to check 'acceptability of a battery sharing service in Europe'. There will be three stations where you can exchange the cells for the Honda EM1 scooter – like swapping a Calor gas bottle when you're camping. Hmm. Battery Fireblade in 2027?

[Knowledge]

Listings

ROAD TEST BACK ISSUES

BLUE = Available just on iPad
RED = Available on iPad and Android
ORANGE = Available in print only

** Claimed * Estimated

BIKE	PRICE	ENGINE	TOPSPEED	POWER	MPG	BIKEVERDICT	RATING	TESTED
Ninja ZX-10R	£17,665	998cc inline 4	185mph	185bhp	52mpg	Amazing race-derived motor, handling, electronics. Performance model (Akra' can) is £1k extra.	9/10	Mar'23
Z900RS	£11,965	948cc inline 4	143mph	102bhp	51mpg	Z900 in retro clobber. And better for it – dynamic, feel and detail are great. SE (£13k) even better.	8/10	Nov'22
Z900	£9865	948cc inline 4	145mph*	123bhp**	52mpg**	If you grew up on inline fours, this is ace. Not as punchy as MT-09, but very good and well priced.	7/10	Sep'17
Z650RS	£8115	649cc twin	130mph*	67bhp**	65mpg**	Spot-on mix of modern Z650's abilities with cool '70s retro vibe. £150 extra for green? Worth it.	8/10	Jan'22
Versys 650	£8415	649cc twin	115mph*	62bhp*	54mpg*	Twin-cylinder all-rounder is knocking on, but latest extras keep it valid. Fine multi-purpose tool.	8/10	Aug'22
Vulcan S	£7615	649cc twin	115mph*	61bhp**	63mpg*	Affordable, good-looking, modern cruiser with ER-6 power. Surprising ability, keen price.	8/10	Jan'22
Ninja 650	£7815	649cc twin	130mph*	67bhp**	70mpg*	Z650 dressed up in ZX-10R costume. Comfy, easy-to-ride, cheery twin for J. Rea wannabes.	9/10	May'17
Z650	£7665	649cc twin	130mph*	67bhp**	70mpg*	Zed is fun, fit, frugal. Nice, but lacks sparkle next to a Hornet, MT-07 or Trident. It's knocking on...	7/10	May'23
KTM ktm.co.uk Bike's choice: practical, verging on sensible, but also very silly. It's the 890 SMT for us, please								
Super Adventure R	£17,299	1301cc V-twin	155mph*	158bhp**	44mpg	Like a rocket-powered 'crosser with cruise, Bluetooth and comfort. Mega... but Multi' V4 better.	9/10	Nov'23
1290 Super Duke GT	£18,799	1301cc V-twin	159mph	158bhp	45mpg	Mad power, sports handling, all the toys and eats miles. Couple of iffy bits, otherwise ace.	9/10	Jan'19
1390 Super Duke R Evo	£19,599	1350cc V-twin	165mph	178bhp	42mpg	Mighty fast yet friendly, sharp but safe, and loads of gizmos. Surprisingly usable supernaked.	9/10	Mar'23
990 Duke	£12,999	947cc twin	145mph*	121bhp**	60mpg**	More mature and finer quality than earlier Dukes, but still loopy. KTM's best naked... but pricey.	9/10	Jan'25
890 SMT	£12,499	899cc twin	130mph**	103bhp*	63mpg	Sharper and more engaging than an adventure bike, more practical than a naked. And a bit silly.	8/10	Feb'24
890 Adventure	£11,999	889cc twin	130mph*	103bhp**	63mpg**	The previous 790 with extra bhp, smoother delivery, tweaked chassis, more tech. Very good.	8/10	Jan'21
690 Enduro R	£9799	690cc single	115mph*	73bhp**	60mpg*	Super-clever Duke/Husky 701 lump in long-legged trailie. Pukka, classy, dual-purpose tool.	8/10	Feb'16
390 Adventure	£6299	373cc single	105mph*	43bhp**	56mpg	Chirpy A2-legal adventurer looks like a 1290 (sort of). But it's basically a 390 Duke in wellies.	8/10	Jul'20
390 Duke	£5499	373cc single	108mph	41bhp	70mpg*	Revv, eager motor in agile 125 chassis? Yes. Looks like the 1290 and less toy-like than it was.	7/10	Jun'17
LANGEN langenmotorcycles.co.uk; 01942 724059 Bike's choice: there's one model, which limits choice. Luckily it's amazing								
Two Stroke	£32,580	249cc V-twin	130mph*	74bhp*	40mpg*	Pricy, yes. But stroker is deliciously engineered, fast, raw. We love it... but 33k is a lot for a 250.	8/10	Dec'23
MASH mashmotorcycles.co.uk; 01264 889012 Bike's choice: go for the X-Ride (but budget for new tyres and suspension)								
650 X-Ride	£5759	644cc single	90mph*	40bhp**	60mpg*	Ex-Honda Dominator motor in 70s-style trailie. Good quality, keen price, let down by chassis.	5/10	Apr'21
Five Hundred 400	£4455	398cc single	80mph*	28bhp**	70mpg**	French brand, made in China, Honda-based motor. Iffy details, odd name, but cheap and fun.	6/10	Dec'17
MOTO GUZZI uk.motoguzzi.it Bike's choice: unique image, sweet ride, classy quality, it's not fast or clever but V85 is lovely								
V100 Mandello S	£15,750	1042cc V-twin	135mph*	108bhp	50mpg	Sports-tourer is classy, comfy, capable, charismatic. Serious alternative to a Honda or BMW.	9/10	Sep'23
Stelvio	£14,700	1042cc V-twin	135mph*	113bhp**	50mpg*	Brilliant V100 (above) in capable, classy, convincing adventure guise. Not a GS, but very good.	9/10	Nov'24
V85 TT	£12,000	853cc V-twin	120mph*	79bhp**	50mpg*	Fabulous adventure mix of old-school charm, proper tech, comfort, and a cheerful dynamic.	9/10	May'24
V85 Strada	£11,200	853cc V-twin	120mph*	79bhp*	50mpg*	Stripped-back V85 has less tech, fewer fixings, but lighter wheels for sharper handling. Decent.	8/10	May'24
V9 Bobber	£9600	853cc V-twin	110mph*	64bhp**	55mpg*	Pleasing V-twin in a trendy, well-made package. Doesn't sell well so haggle yourself a top deal.	8/10	Jun'16
V7 Special	£8600	853cc V-twin	115mph*	64bhp**	63mpg	Style, ride and badge all spot-on. 850 V-twin isn't as grunty as a Street Twin, but we forgive it.	9/10	Jul'21
MOTO MORINI motomorini.eu Bike's choice: you might need to be brave, but the Milano is a convincingly authentic Morini								
Milano	£12,700	1187cc V-twin	145mph*	114bhp**	42mpg	Instant chunky power, firm and direct chassis, neat '70s paint. Buying is a gamble, but it's cool.	8/10	Nov'19
X-Cape	£6999	649cc twin	109mph*	59bhp**	49mpg	Made in China with CFMoto engine. Great spec, good quality, rides well. No Ténéré, but cheap.	7/10	Mar'22
MV AGUSTA mvagusta.co.uk; 0844 4128450 Bike's choice: latest Brutale is refined, usable, yet still exotic								
Enduro Veloce	£20,000	931cc inline 3	149mph**	122bhp**	40mpg*	Fast, accurate, inspiring, surprisingly complete adventurer. But no use on trails. Expensive, too.	7/10	Jan'25
Dragster 800 RR SCS	£18,220	798cc inline 3	150mph*	138bhp*	45mpg	Expensive, yes. But also classy, high-spec, comfy, and refined like no MV before. Impressive.	8/10	Jan'22
Superveloce	£18,980	798cc inline 3	160mph*	146bhp**	41mpg	Super-sporty F3 in semi-retro dress. Fast, sharp, sounds top, looks superb, quite demanding.	8/10	Mar'23
Turismo Veloce Rosso	£13,930	798cc inline 3	136mph	110bhp**	48mpg*	Adventure bike? Nah, it's like a high-rise sportsbike. So-so ride, busy dash, but it's good.	8/10	Jan'19
F3800 Rosso	£14,840	798cc inline 3	161mph	148bhp**	34mpg*	Crisp, punchy, trim. Easier on the road than a 600 but still focused – needs a track to really shine.	8/10	Apr'14
Brutale 800 RR	£15,590	798cc inline 3	153mph**	138bhp**	40mpg**	Top engine, nimble, great looks, ridiculous hard ride. Semi-auto clutch version a bit gimmicky.	6/10	Apr'19
NORTON nortonmotorcycles.com; 0121 565 4411 Bike's choice: Think Norton, think Commando... and it's good to ride, too								
V4SV	£44,000	1200cc V4	180mph*	185bhp**	40mpg*	Not as slick as an M1000RR, expensive. So what? Brit sportsbike is solid, fast, beautiful, unique.	8/10	Dec'23
V4CR	£42,000	1200cc V4	175mph*	185bhp**	40mpg*	Sculpted café racer is modern and old-school at the same time. Pricy but effective exotica.	9/10	Oct'23
Commando 961 SP	£16,999	961cc twin	125mph*	77bhp**	40mpg*	Traditional pushrod Brit twin for the modern world. Sweet handling, well made, lots of character.	9/10	Mar'23
ROYAL ENFIELD royalenfield.com/uk; 0844 412 8450 Bike's choice: Himalayan 450 is a superb mix of performance, quality and price								
Continental GT	£6799	648cc twin	110mph*	44bhp	60mpg*	Café racer has flexible motor, light handling, keen price – but Inter' version (below) is nicer.	8/10	Apr'19
Interceptor	£6599	648cc twin	110mph	44bhp	60mpg	Charming twin has authentic feel, fine looks and attractive price. Think Indian-made Guzzi V7.	9/10	Mar'23
Himalayan 450	£5850	452cc single	90mph*	40bhp**	78mpg**	Rugged, functional appeal, now with more oomph and improved ride and quality. Great bike.	9/10	Jul'24
Classic	£4619	349cc single	72mph	19bhp	79mpg	The hugely successful Meteor dressed up like an old Bullet. Easy-going basic Sunday plodder.	7/10	Aug'22
Meteor	£4219	349cc single	72mph	19bhp	79mpg	Simple, chirpy character, light handling, nicely made, and super cheap. Fast? No way. Fun? Yes.	8/10	Nov'21
SUZUKI suzuki-gb.co.uk; 0845 850 8800 Bike's choice: V-Strom 800DE is everything a mid-size adventure should be								
Hayabusa	£18,165	1340cc inline 4	186mph*	187bhp**	42mpg**	There are more powerful bikes. But nothing goes stupid fast with the ease and class of a Busa.	8/10	Jul'22
V-Strom 1050XT	£13,865	1037cc V-twin	137mph	99bhp	52mpg	Loads of gizmos, amazing screen, plush-yet-secure ride, solid motor. It's no GS... but top value.	8/10	Dec'20
GSX-S1000GX	£14,499	999cc inline 4	145mph**	150bhp*	45mpg*	The GT (below) in adventure-sports guise. Not perfect, but ace suspension, toys, ride and feel.	8/10	May'24
GSX-S1000GT	£11,665	999cc inline 4	155mph*	150bhp*	46mpg**	GSX-R power, all-day comfort, lots of toys and good-looking, too. Trad' sports-tourers are back.	8/10	May'22
Katana	£12,465	999cc inline 4	152mph	147bhp	46mpg	Superb GSX-S supernaked with sharp 80s-inspired styling. Bold yet usable, and underrated.	8/10	Nov'19

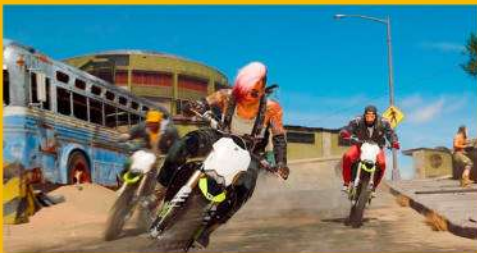


Flippin' 'eck

► In October this year there were 7861 new two-wheelers registered in the UK. That's big bikes, mopeds, scooters, electric contraptions, the lot. Even includes trikes (of which, surprisingly, there were 42). In India in the same month, there were 101,886 bikes sold... just by Royal Enfield. Add exports (which were up 150% year on year) and the expanding brand set a new record by flogging over 110,000 machines in a month. Bewildering.

** Claimed * Estimated

BIKE	PRICE	ENGINE	TOPSPEED	POWER	MPG	BIKE VERDICT	RATING	TESTED
V-Strom 800DE	£10,665	776cc twin	125mph*	83bhp**	52mpg	Gutsy motor, proper comfort, better suspension than rivals, and fine spec list too. Great bike.	9/10	Aug '23
GSX-8R	£8899	776cc twin	130mph*	82bhp**	52mpg*	Think GSX-R mixed with a commuter. Easy to ride, friendly, but also grunty, agile, plush. Lovely.	9/10	Dec '24
GSX-8S	£8299	776cc twin	130mph*	82bhp**	50mpg*	Usable grunt, secure handling, fine ride, nicely made. Pricier than MT-07 and Hornet, but better.	9/10	Jul '23
V-Strom 650 XT	£8965	645cc V-twin	115mph*	60bhp*	45mpg	£700 over the base model (below) gets you hand guards and wire wheels. Worth it for the looks.	7/10	Jul '17
SV650	£7165	645cc V-twin	122mph	74bhp	50mpg	Chirpy, cheerful, usable, quick, proven, though Yam MT-07 has a bit more zip and charm.	7/10	Apr '19
GSX-R125	£5078	124cc single	80mph*	15bhp**	123mpg**	Perky motor, better power-to-weight than rivals, and cheaper. Won't suit big-boned, mind.	9/10	Nov '17
TRIUMPH triumphmotorcycles.co.uk Bike's choice: Speed Twin 1200 isn't perfect, but it's flippin' compelling								
Rocket 3 GT	£22,695	2458cc inline 3	138mph**	165bhp**	35mpg	Huge motor is amazing, handling is ridiculous, but firm ride and sheer bulk limit use as 'real' GT.	8/10	May '21
Rocket 3 R	£21,995	2458cc inline 3	138mph**	165bhp**	35mpg	Cruiser? Hardly. With a stiff chassis, handling and crazy grunt, the R is a Mad Max supernaked.	8/10	Feb '21
Tiger 1200 Rally Pro	£18,295	1200cc inline 3	140mph*	148bhp**	55mpg**	Lots of power, tech, comfort and class, and they've stopped the vibes, too. Well done, Triumph.	9/10	Aug '24
Thruxton RS	£14,195	1200cc twin	130mph*	103bhp**	50mpg	Trad' charm and neat details with punching, revvy twin, track-able chassis and premium finish.	9/10	Mar '20
Scrambler 1200 XE	£13,295	1200cc twin	130mph*	89bhp**	56mpg	Easy-going B-lane thrummer is classy, rewarding, sensibly priced. Think retro adventure bike.	8/10	Jan '25
Speedmaster	£12,995	1200cc twin	110mph*	76bhp**	55mpg**	Low-slung Bobber transformed for the USA with beach 'bars, shiny bits and pillion perch.	8/10	Sep '18
Bonneville Bobber	£12,995	1200cc twin	120mph*	77bhp**	56mpg	Oodles of grunt, capable chassis, spot-on stance and feel. Perfect blend of modern and retro.	9/10	Jan '22
Speed Twin 1200	£11,795	1200cc twin	130mph*	96bhp**	50mpg	Retro-supernaked has mighty grunt and sharp chassis with flat-cap looks. Great, but a bit...lost.	8/10	Nov '22
Bonneville T120	£11,795	1200cc twin	120mph*	79bhp**	54mpg	Lolloping grunt, steadfast chassis, top finish. Hasn't Street Twin's agility, but has finer ride.	9/10	Sep '18
Speed Triple RR	£17,950	1160cc inline 3	150mph	166bhp	39mpg	Great spec, comfort, usability, quality. Top adventurer-tourer, but Rally (above) has more pizzazz.	8/10	Jun '22
Speed Triple RS	£15,795	1160cc inline 3	175mph*	178bhp**	38mpg	Awesome motor, ace outright handling, full tech. But too stiff and focused for the road. Shame.	8/10	Nov '21
Scrambler 900	£9795	900cc twin	110mph*	54bhp**	60mpg	The Bonnie platform in laid-back, urban-ready scrambler form. Charming, if a little bit 'meh'.	7/10	Jan '24
Bonneville T100	£9595	900cc twin	110mph*	54bhp**	60mpg	All the style and easy-going pleasures of the T120. Makes 24bhp less, but is £1900 (!) cheaper.	9/10	Sep '18
Speed Twin 900	£8795	900cc twin	110mph*	64bhp**	60mpg	Handsome, pleasing, well-made retro with decent grunt and easy-to-flick chassis. Really good.	9/10	Dec '22
Tiger 900 Rally Pro	£14,495	888cc inline 3	130mph*	106bhp**	60mpg**	High-tech, high-spec adventurer really can go (almost) anywhere. Brisk, smooth, plush, lovely.	9/10	Mar '24
Tiger 900 GT Pro	£13,895	888cc inline 3	130mph*	106bhp**	60mpg**	Great spec, comfort, usability, quality. Top adventurer-tourer, but Rally (above) has more pizzazz.	9/10	Nov '24
Tiger 850 Sport	£10,095	888cc inline 3	125mph*	84bhp**	49mpg	Confusingly, 850 is actually the base Tiger 900. Lowest power, fewest toys, but decent enough.	8/10	Apr '23
Street Triple 765 RS	£11,295	765cc inline 3	145mph*	128bhp**	53mpg**	Best road-going sporty bike Triumph have ever made. Ace. Less-blingy R (£10,295) is great too.	9/10	Oct '24
Tiger Sport 660	£8945	660cc inline 3	135mph*	80bhp**	60mpg**	660 Trident repackaged as a practical high-riding all-rounder. Giant-slaying brilliance.	9/10	Mar '23
Daytona 660	£8595	660cc inline 3	135mph*	94bhp**	58mpg**	Like a three-cylinder CBR650R. Fit motor, comfy, but not as sharp as rivals. Missing an edge.	9/10	Dec '24
Trident 660	£7895	660cc inline 3	129mph	75bhp	54mpg	Affordable and friendly like an MT-07, sweet handling like a Street Trip'. Bit stiff, otherwise great.	8/10	May '23
Scrambler 400 X	£5595	398cc single	90mph*	40bhp**	80mpg**	Entry model has the right performance, looks, feel, quality. Convincing. Speed 400 just as good.	9/10	May '24
VOGE vogeuk.co.uk, 01932 358000 Bike's choice: doesn't quite hit the high-end positioning it strives, but 500DS is decent								
500DS	£5565	471cc twin	110mph*	47bhp**	63mpg	China's take on Honda's CB500X. Not as good as a CB, but impressive – and great spec for £5k.	7/10	Feb '21
YAMAHA yamaha-motor.co.uk, 01932 358000 Bike's choice: sporty and engaging, yet friendly and fun – MT-09 is a proper device								
R1M	£24,460	998cc inline 4	186mph	192bhp	40mpg	MotoGP-derived electronics + track-focused superbike = incredible. Limited availability.	9/10	Feb '21
R1	£18,810	998cc inline 4	186mph*	192bhp	40mpg	Stiff, tall, high geared on road, but raciest of the race reps is special and peerless on track.	9/10	Dec '19
MT-10 SP	£16,510	998cc inline 4	153mph	152bhp	38mpg	Already amazing MT-10 with R1 SP's electronic suspenders. Great, if not obviously better.	9/10	May '17
MT-10	£14,210	998cc inline 4	153mph	152bhp	38mpg	Not as wild as some rivals, but cheaper, easier to ride, and still epic. Thinking rider's supernaked.	9/10	Aug '22
Niken GT	£16,210	890cc inline 3	117mph	113bhp**	45mpg*	Three-wheeler has more front-end grip than anything, fit motor, fine touring ability Ace, but odd.	8/10	Aug '23
Tracer 9 GT+	£14,910	890cc inline 3	146mph	107bhp	57mpg	The defining 'mid-size' upright sports tourer. Not the cheapest, but easily the best. Fabulous.	10/10	Feb '24
XSR900 GP	£12,506	890cc inline 3	135mph*	117bhp**	50mpg*	If this is the future of retro, sign us up. XSR in '80s fag-packet sportsbike form is a glorious thing.	9/10	Sep '24
Tracer 9	£11,010	890cc inline 3	146mph	107bhp	47mpg	Adventurer presence, comfort, practicality – it's a top road bike. High-spec GT worth the extra.	9/10	Apr '23
XSR900	£10,610	890cc inline 3	130mph	107bhp	49mpg	Ace MT-09 reworked into a convincing '80s flat-bar superbike. Cool, fun, sexy, but a bit stiff.	9/10	Nov '22
MT-09 SP	£11,310	890cc inline 3	130mph*	117bhp**	48mpg	Öhlins shock, classy forks, R1M paint job, brilliant engine. Superb everyday semi-supernaked.	9/10	Oct '24
MT-09	£10,100	890cc inline 3	130mph*	117bhp**	49mpg*	Top triple has new-found handling prowess and tech, but keeps its usable playfulness. Proper.	9/10	Jan '25
Ténéré World Raid	£11,910	689cc twin	120mph*	72bhp**	61mpg	Mega Ténéré (below) with large tank and tall dirt-biased set-up. Better on trails, worse on road.	8/10	Oct '22
Ténéré 700	£10,110	689cc twin	120mph*	72bhp**	55mpg*	Fit MT-07 motor in Dakar-ish chassis. Charms on tarmac, rocks on trails. Tall, light, raw, but ace.	9/10	Aug '23
Tracer 7	£8810	689cc twin	125mph*	70bhp	56mpg	Super-fun MT-07 with practical niceties. The datum for all-rounder value. GT even better.	9/10	Aug '20
R7	£8910	689cc twin	130mph*	72bhp**	56mpg*	More than a faired MT-07. Lacks a bit of wow but properly sporty, ace in corners, fun, affordable.	8/10	Aug '22
XSR700	£8260	689cc twin	119mph	70bhp	49mpg	MT-07 in period costume. Proof retro looks can work with a modern dynamic. LC paint is great.	9/10	Jun '16
MT-07	£7510	689cc twin	122mph*	74bhp	48mpg	Fun, capable, perky, appealing, good value. Great bike, but Honda Hornet makes it feel dated.	9/10	May '23
R3	£6405	321cc twin	102mph*	41bhp**	65mpg	Light, revvy, fun-to-ride, well finished. Ability and spec fight for title of best A2 sportsbike.	8/10	May '19
R125	£5302	125cc single	80mph*	15bhp	92mpg	R1 looks, big bike feel, clever engine. Easy to see why they sell so many to enthusiastic teens.	8/10	May '19
ZERO zeromotorcycles.com, +3172 5112014 Bike's choice: SR/S is good enough to convert stubborn petrolheads								
SR/S Premium	£20,495	electric motor	124mph**	110bhp**	242mpc	Fast, torquey, smooth, hi-spec, great to ride. Range and charge time bearable. Price a bit salty.	8/10	Jul '22
SR/F Premium	£19,850	electric motor	124mph**	110bhp**	250mpc	Quick, decent range, simple to ride, easy to like. Bit drab to look at, usual charging point issues.	7/10	Sep '19
S	£14,540	electric motor	86mph**	59bhp**	200mpc	Simple commuter has basic chassis, slow charging and ain't cheap, but costs peanuts to run.	6/10	Dec '20



Virtual Triumph

■ Are you a 'gamer'? Good news: Triumph's TF 250-X motocrosser is in the new *Call of Duty: Warzone Area 99*. You can 'ride' the bike and do skids and wheelies on something called the Area 99 Resurgence map. The game is on Xbox Series X/S, Xbox One, PlayStation 5, PlayStation 4, and on PC via Microsoft Store, Battle.net, and Steam. We don't really have any idea what any of this all means, but it sounds terribly exciting.

Bike Next month



BATTLE OF THE BIG 'UNS

**New BMW R1300GS Adventure v Triumph Tiger 1200
v Ducati Multistrada V4 Rally**

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» Jake Dixon opens up to Mat Oxley » Inside the sideways world of Supermoto**

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**source: www.reviews.co.uk/company-reviews/store/mcn-compare



[Head to toe]

Winter togs

Chilly wind? Spot of rain? No bother in the right kit. **Paul Lang** reveals his favourite gear for the darker months

OXFORD ATLAS B-30 ADVANCED £169.99

Not all rucksacks are the same. There isn't enough room in this magazine to list all the features, but what I really like are the shoulder straps and magnetic chest clasp – they're so ergonomic. You don't feel the weight of your luggage, it's all-day comfy. Totally waterproof, amazing quality, and comes with an underseat strap to use it as a tailpack. Oh, and a lifetime warranty. oxfordproducts.com

'Total protection with bags of safety features and warranties. Perfection'

RUKKA EXPLORE-R TROUSERS £1015

I have stumper legs than a milking stool, but Rukka do a 'short' option and my strides fit perfectly – that's rare. Waist adjustability allows for dad bod, the large waterproof pockets and vents work as they should, and they zip easily to the jacket thanks to a chunky zip. Braces to keep 'em up, too. Packing the same weather-beating features as the jacket, winter can naff off. bikerheadz.co.uk

SCHUBERTH C5 £589.99

I am a flip-front convert. There, said it. Easier when refuelling and nattering to others, and nature wees are more pleasant. It's also the quietest helmet I own, all-day comfy, light enough not to notice, and has ventilation I can actually feel working. Only niggle was with a Pinlock insert that misted and needed replacing. bikerheadz.co.uk

DAYTONA ROAD STAR GTX £469.99

Stiff at first, these are now like slippers. After a couple of years of constant use I've had no issues with my Daytonas at all. Never leaked, always toasty, zips glide with ease still, and they inspire confidence every time I put them on. You get total protection with bags of safety features and warranties. Perfection. Now replaced by the Pro version – and that means deals... bikerheadz.co.uk



FIVE WFX SKIN EVO GTX £129.99

Always been a fan of Five gloves, and now winter has set in I'm wearing these toasty versions. I love that they're goat leather with stretchy panels in the right places, plus have lashings of Gore-Tex and knuckle protection. Cuffs are covered in Taslan, a water-repellent fabric, but it doesn't get tested as they tuck inside a jacket snugly. Visor wipe on left hand, touch-sensitive finger for satnav fiddling. Ace. Try before you buy, as I find they come up a tad large.
five-gloves.com



RUKKA EXPLORE-R JACKET £1330

If Savile Row created bike gear, it'd be Rukka. The highest-quality kit I have, it'll outlast me. I've never been frozen or wet – nothing gets by the Gore-Tex Pro laminate. It's AA rated and has D30 armour, even in the chest if you fancy. Expensive, yes – but try it and you will understand. With their thin yet spookily warm Down-X 2.0 puffa-style thermal underneath (£199), it's an unbeatable set-up. You can wear the Down-X on its own to the pub, too.
And for dog walking, footie watching...
bikerheadz.co.uk

[Know it all]

Sidecar cornering

Ben Matthews is a sidecar addict and managing director of Watsonian Sidecars

Riding a sidecar round corners is not a dark art – it's just different. And once you get your head round it you can have some really good fun – I've heard so many riders say they wished they tried it years ago.

The problem motorcyclists have is that because a sidecar has all the controls in the same place as a bike, they think it will behave the same. Which it doesn't. The main thing is to realise you have to steer in the direction you want to go. Lots of motorcyclists who hop on a sidecar go straight on at the first corner because they instinctively try to countersteer and lean, neither of which will work.

Left-handers are more difficult than right-handers for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the sidecar has a tendency to lift up as you go round the corner if you haven't got a passenger in there to weigh it down. If that's the case, you have to lean into the corner to shift some weight to the inside.

The second reason is that shutting the throttle as you go into a left-hander – which you instinctively do if you've gone in a bit hot – makes the sidecar steer right. This is because the driven wheel is on the right, with the sidecar on the left – so

as you throttle off, the sidecar is effectively trying to overtake you, veering you right.

Conversely, if you accelerate, the outfit pulls left because the driven wheel is trying to overtake the sidecar.

Understanding that can help your cornering because you can help the sidecar steer round a left-hand bend by accelerating. Of course, you need

to know what you're doing because if a novice were to do that they'd generally go straight on. The whole process needs to be learned slowly, so it all becomes natural.

It's worth persevering though because you'll be astonished how much fun it can be.

» More info: watsonian-squire.com



You get your head round it... eventually...

[The best tyres for your...]

125 commuter

CST Street Tyre £100 pair

bickers-online.co.uk

» Decent grip, good feel, impervious to wear, and cheaper than a good night in the local.

All desirable traits of tyres for a small-capacity daily workhorse. Especially the last one. However, I've got another: having a tread pattern and profile that don't look like they were based on the OE fitment for a 1956 Jawa. This last bit came to light when

getting tyres for my son's Lexmoto Hunter 50 (which is the same as the 125, only slower).

As a teen he didn't want tyres that looked 'like antiques', as originally fitted, so we got some CST Street Tyres – yes, because he liked the

look. Thing is, they've transformed how his wee bike behaves and given him loads more confidence. As used on Yamaha's YBR125, they're only around £100 a pair – and I suspect will outlive the bike. **MA**



[Our bikes]

'Grubby, ugly, slow... perfect'

There's something joyous about a winter workhorse. **Luke Brackenbury** buys himself a splendid pre-loved Honda



Came with oodles of spares. Won't need them

This magazine is to blame for this purchase. Rewind back to 1998 and *Bike*'s glitzy 'Bike of the Year' photoshoot. At the time I was the 17-year-old work experience kid (what an education) and was laughing at the Deauville. Why? At that time I believed that sportsbikes were everything.

Bike has always brilliantly championed the diverse and eclectic machines available, and so I was quickly educated about the Honda. And they let me ride it into the huge barn being used for the photoshoot, making it the first road bike over 125cc that I'd ever ridden. You don't forget your first...

Age and experience have since taught me rather a lot, and that reliability and functionality have their place. Bring on

the centrestand and panniers. Immaturity means I'm still always looking for an excuse to buy another motorcycle.

I have a twice-weekly, 160-mile round commute, and my cheery Honda CB500 is (temporarily) out of action. But driving – or rather sitting stationary – soon becomes dull. Action is needed. I need a cost-effective solution and editor Armitage is the inspiration: over 20 years ago now, he was the first person I knew to buy cheap old transport for winter. I scoffed at him then, but soon followed his lead. The trendsetter.

Fortunately, my search isn't long as WhatsApp soon delivers. Short story: the Longest Day Challenge is an annual charity ride from Land's End to John o' Groats raising money for Cancer Research UK.

I completed the 1,031-mile, non-motorway trip in 20 hours 50 minutes in 2022 on the CB500. Finishing a few hours behind that year was this very Honda Deauville – or 'Cruella', as it's named. And it has come up for sale on the Longest Day group chat for £600 with 'spares' and a winter-clearing five-month MoT.

Hopefully arriving with an empty van, I meet owner Shaun in Essex. We chat for so long it's too dark and cold to test ride the bike, but in the van it goes. Shaun is a car mechanic and the preparation the bike would have had for completing the LEJOG mission is validation for me. And the spares? The van gets brimmed with another bike-and-a-half in chunks. Along with a Haynes manual.

Slipping away

A man with a beard and short grey hair is leaning against a textured grey wall. He is wearing a yellow and beige plaid jacket with a shearling collar, dark blue jeans, and dark sneakers. He has his hands in his pockets and is looking towards the camera. The background is a plain, textured wall with some fallen leaves at the bottom.

**'All this joy
for a princely
£600. Every
home needs
winter wheels'**

My test ride is to lob the Deauville straight into the 160-mile round trip. It delivers on every requirement: comfy, excellent weather protection, a useful 55mpg, and no chain to lube and adjust. After 500 Honda-powered miles, this what I've learned...

The good stuff: it's the perfect two-wheeled car, which for winter is ideal, but with all the bike benefits. It's already saved three hours of my life so far. I'm in like with it – strong like.

The not so good stuff: the rear shock and weak brakes, the state of the bodywork and wheels. The effort needed to get it on the centrestand, too.

The revelation: money can buy time and happiness after all. All these hours and all this joy for a princely £600. Every home needs winter wheels. **LB**

I'm replacing the clutch plates on this 2014 Suzuki GSX-R750 with both guilt and satisfaction. Guilt because the clutch's demise was down to me performance testing it; satisfaction that I achieved excellent quarter-mile data... before it cooked itself.

So then: aftermarket or original? The Suzuki parts add up to just under £400, but a quality aftermarket kit from EBC with heavy-duty springs is just under £115. I put the bike on its sidestand – with it leaning over this stops oil running out when the clutch cover is removed. This won't apply to all bikes, but can save faffing around with drain trays. The GSX-R's clutch is conventional, with actuation via a pushrod from the left-hand side of the engine. Just make sure there's ample free play at the lever, or if there's an actuating lever on the clutch case side you can release the cable. Undo the cover's bolts and make a note of any different lengths. Tease the cover off, keeping an eye for locating dowels; if it refuses to budge have a look around the edges for pry points, but use them carefully.

The outer pressure plate is secured by the springs. Undo these, and remove the plates individually, keeping note of the order: it's usually friction plate then steel plate, repeated until the last friction. Make sure your new plates are the same and surf them up. Check your manual as there's often an anti-shudder shim or

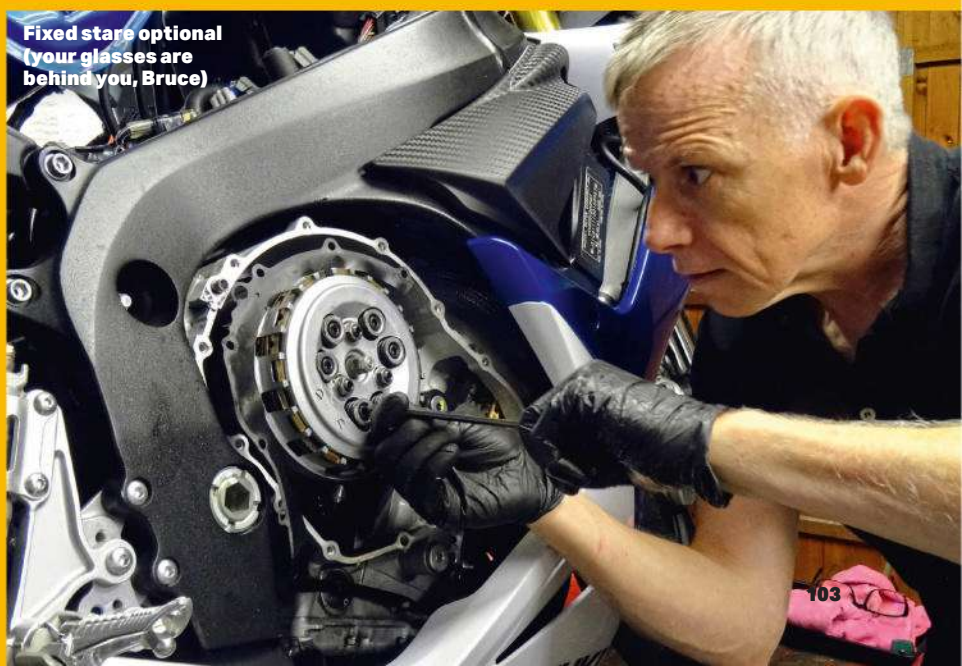
additional sprung retainer. First and last plates sometimes differ too – on the GSX-R the last friction plate is thinner than the rest.

Clean the clutch drum and basket with brake cleaner. Use a brush to agitate heavier deposits, and rinse with a blast of brake cleaner. Clean the inside and outside of the pressure plate and cover, too. Scotchbrite is good to get traces of old gasket from the engine and cover. Soak the new frictions in the oil used in the engine or gearbox for at least an hour. Smear oil on the steels, too. Fit the plates in the correct order, ensuring the steels are in the right way – the round edges usually face a specific way (inwards on this GSX-R). Fit the pressure plate; sometimes there will be marks to line it up with the clutch basket. Refit springs and nip them up evenly, then torque them as per your manual. With a pushrod system, check in the manual for any screw or locknut adjustment.

Ensure cover-locating dowels are in place and fit a new gasket. As the clutch cover goes on remember to engage the actuating lever. When the case is seated nip the bolts up then deploy the torque wrench. Run the engine up for a few minutes, stop it and check the oil level. Check the clutch lever free play before a test ride – it's likely this has changed, so give it a tweak.

Difficulty rating:  

**Fixed stare optional
(your glasses are
behind you, Bruce)**



This is Honda's Jack Kennedy, 2024 Supersport champ on a CBR. We're looking forward to seeing the Rapid boys in the mix next year

[Racing]

'Supersport is the future'

After years in the doldrums, Supersport is on the up. Which is why Rapid Honda is changing classes...

Twenty years ago 600cc sportsbikes sold like air fryers and the Supersport class thrived. Grids were packed with 140bhp R6s, CBR600RRs, ZX-6Rs and GSX-R600s, and the likes of Cal Crutchlow, Chaz Davies and Leon Camier used it as a springboard to greater things. But after the 2008 credit crunch, 600 sales waned and Supersport became a technical dead end. Great riders still won it, but there was no strength in depth.

Now things are changing. For 2025 the class will use New Generation Supersport rules, which means the bikes will have their power balanced to create a level playing field. That means the latest Honda CBR600RR (599cc four-cylinder) can race Yamaha's new R9 (890cc triple), Ducati's new Panigale V2 (890cc V-twin), Triumph's

Street Triple 765 (765cc triple), Kawasaki's ZX-6R (636cc four), plus a few R6s and the odd Kramer (a specialist race bike powered by a KTM 890 twin).

Suddenly, manufacturers are interested again. Which brings us to *Bike's* favourite band of plucky underdogs – Rapid Honda. During 2024 they competed in British Superbikes, but for 2025 they have decided to move to British Supersport.

'We looked at doing Superbikes again with the old bike,' says team owner Matt Bainbridge. 'But realistically a good weekend will be getting points [ie, top 15] and a great weekend will be top 10. I couldn't get excited about it. We feel like we've taken Franco [Bourne, last year's rider] as far as we can and want to move on for 2025. So, here's why we chose Supersport...'



McCabe: tipped to make an impact



Jenner: bossed GP2 class in '24

Rapid Honda's new riders

Owen Jenner, 20

» 'A motocrosser who started road racing in 2018,' says Matt. 'He won the Team Green Junior Cup in his first year, then won the Junior Supersport Championship the following year. In 2023 he won the Junior Stock 600 Championship, and in 2024 took the GP2 Championship. Okay, so GP2 is a bit of a nothing class, but he won 18 out of 20 races, which isn't bad. He is definitely talented, and is at the right stage to push on.'

Harley McCabe, 16

» 'I'd heard of him because he wiped the floor with everyone in the MiniGP series on the Ohvale a few years ago,' says Matt. 'We did a 24-hour race on 125s, gave him a ride, and he really impressed – our bike had a knackered gearbox, but he didn't complain and somehow managed to set the third fastest time out of everyone in the final session. He's got some talent – and he's the perfect age to make an impact.'



'Long-term, the Supersport class makes more sense in the UK'

1) 'Our main objective as a team is to support young riders, and Supersport is a better place to do that than Superbikes. One reason is that Honda's new pathway for World Superbike riders is now Supersport, not Superbikes – Honda have told me they'll be using Supersport as the feeder series. The reason is that getting good on a superbike in BSB is pretty pointless as it doesn't prepare you for WSB – just look at how the brilliant Tommy Bridewell did in his last wildcard ride [he qualified 20th and crashed out of both races]. It makes more sense to pluck great young riders straight from Supersport.'

2) 'It's a cheaper class so we can help two riders. If you buy a Fireblade for superbikes you have to chuck away the swingarm, forks, wheels and tank, whereas

in Supersport you keep all that. And the base bike is cheaper to start with [£10,529 versus £23,499]. It means we can free up budget to run another bike for 16-year-old Harley McCabe (see panel, above). That's exciting.'

3) 'Commercially, the class is far more important to manufacturers than Superbikes. Gone are the days when Fireblades sold in their thousands – Yamaha don't even make an R1 for the road anymore. Compare that to the supersport class, which has loads of new bikes.'

4) 'Superbikes are increasingly problematic on UK tracks. The BSB



Come on, Harley. Smile. You're riding for Bike's fave team

organisers are trying to slow the bikes down, but they can't slow them down too much otherwise Superstock will be quicker. Long-term, the Supersport class makes more sense in the UK.'

5) 'As a result of all that, Supersport will be more competitive than ever in 2025. It means that if we get into the top six – which is what we want – we know we've done a good job. Supersport is no longer a backwater.' **Bike**



[Ahead of its time]

'75 Corbin-Gentry

It's all batteries, kilowatts and charge rates these days... and, of course, it's all nowt new. The delightful XLP-1 was whirring around half a century ago

You can trace the early gestation of the electric motorcycle back to the late 19th century, should you care to. *Bike* prefers to major on the first electric motorcycle offered for sale: the 1975 Corbin-Gentry XLP-1.

The XLP-1 was of its time. The 1973 Yom Kippur War between Israel and Arab coalition forces resulted in a huge oil price spike, with US gasoline rising from 39 to 53 cents a gallon by 1974. People were desperate to drop fossil fuels for something else – anything else.

Mike Corbin – totally the right man in just about the right place at almost the right time – had the expertise, the funds, and the vision to provide an alternative. Corbin had left the US Navy in 1964 as an electrician and set up his own sparks business with a side hustle making custom motorcycle seats. By 1968 he went full-time with the seats and changed the company name to Corbin-Gentry.

Gentry? Sure, why not? Songstress Bobbie Gentry had a big hit with the haunting Southern Gothic smash *Ode to Billie Joe* in 1967, so Corbin tagged Gentry onto the business letterhead in 1970. The random rebrand worked and the business mushroomed.

The seat gig was great but electric speed was Corbin's big thing. In 1973 he rode the first electric bike to top 100mph at Bonneville,

then topped that in 1974 with a 165.39mph average, with one run at 201mph. This was not bested for nearly 40 years.

The XLP-1 (Experimental Limited Production) carried three 12V batteries providing 4.7kW hours of go. This was enough for a publicity stunt riding an XLP-1 to the top of Mount Washington in New Hampshire not once, but twice. The eight-mile route to the 2000m summit featured a gradient as high as 18 per cent in places, averaging out at 12 per cent. This was a pretty damn good performance for a bike from the lead-acid battery era. With a 30mph top speed, a 30-mile range and a three-hour charge time, this was peak electric motorbike in 1975.

The cheapest version of the XLP-1 cost \$1395. A Honda Cub cost \$300. The price point was an obstacle then, as it tends to be now. Although the XLP looked okay by the standards of the time, which is always a signal achievement for any electric two-wheeler.

The US's mass panic attack over fuel prices was soon over and a 50mph/100-mile range XLP-2 planned for 1977 never made it off the drawing board. Corbin is still an evangelist for 'leccy bikes and says: 'With AC controllers and motors it's almost unlimited what we're going to be able to do with electric vehicles.' **Mark Graham**

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